

# HIERSCHAU

AN EXAMPLE OF RUSSIAN MENNONITE LIFE



Helmut T. Huebert





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MENNONITE LIFE*



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by  
Helmut T. Huebert



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## FOREWORD

There are by now many histories of Mennonites, including the panoramic accounts of Russian Mennonite life. Another history of the Mennonites in Russia thus requires some justification. While the present book does not add all that much to what historians already know about the "Russian Mennonite experience," it is nevertheless unique among the wealth of Russian Mennonite publications.

This book, written with the general reader in mind, provides an interesting and valuable microscopic view of a small nineteenth century Mennonite village which becomes representative of all the Mennonite colonies and life on the South Russian steppes. Through the many details and individual personalities in one village, the reader gains significant insights into the larger Russian Mennonite world. For example, what Huebert writes about the farmers' experiences in Hierschau applies equally to all Mennonites in the colonies: "To the Mennonite farmer in Hierschau, God spoke most directly through the waving heads of ripened winterwheat, through the sweet taste of juicy watermelons, through the satisfaction of a full larder when the cold winds of winter started to blow."

Written not by an historian but by a practising physician who writes for the love of Mennonite history in general and his ancestors in particular, the narrative flows smoothly and unimpeded by professional jargon. Moreover, as the above quotation indicates, Huebert's style allows the reader to see, hear and even smell the Mennonite world of the Russian steppes.

The story of Hierschau is unique in another way. The village, as its name implies, was to be a model, an example of Mennonite agricultural thrift and progress. Planned by the enlightened and progressive Johann Cornies in the first half of the nineteenth century, the village was established to exhibit what the purpose of Mennonite existence in Russia was to be. According to the intentions of the Czarist government, the Mennonites were to be model farmers and examples in other ways for their non-Mennonite neighbours. This somewhat un-Mennonite attitude — for Mennonites used to be the quiet ones in the land — registered a new spirit among the Russian Mennonites, a spirit of elation at having come of age culturally, economically and socially. Mennonites in nineteenth-century Russia were now willing, even eager, to expose themselves and their accomplishments to the world around them, and witness to a faith and values which they considered superior to their Russian and German neighbours. Hierschau

("Look here!") thus became a symbol of a new Mennonitism, introduced, cultivated and propelled into modern times by Johann Cornies and other progressive Mennonite leaders.

Huebert does not idealize the village in which his mother was born or Mennonite life in the colonies. While he is obviously most sympathetic to the world, institutions and people he describes, Huebert remains objective and factual throughout his narrative, thus allowing the reader to form his own opinions and conclusions about the Russian Mennonite past. As he writes in the Preface: "While the opinion of the historian is valuable, my preference is to be given the facts, so that I, at least to some degree, can make up my own mind as to their significance. I have tried to extend this courtesy to my readers."

Without condemning or judging, Huebert is not afraid to be critical where Mennonites failed to live up to their profession of brotherhood and love. Such things as the "barley dispute" of 1858, the plight of the landless among the Mennonites, and the selfish attitudes and actions of the well-to-do are described with candour, sometimes with disapproval, but always with fairness to all concerned. Even the painful period of the *Selbstschutz*, in which Mennonites were forced to defend themselves and their goods, is treated by Huebert, who fully subscribes to nonresistance, with objectivity and fairness.

The author's ironic comments and humour are delightful. For example, commenting on the postal service in Russia and comparing it to our own, Huebert writes: "Perhaps the correspondent would have taken solace in the fact that postal services have not markedly improved in the intervening years!" The simple-mindedness of some Hierschauers and other Mennonites is treated humourously and the cartoons included in the book add delightful touches and provide comic relief to the more serious episodes.

When the Mennonite world in Russia came to an end after 1917, there were many writers who lamented its destruction and expressed grief, sometimes anger, at the loss of what they considered an almost utopian existence. To this day some Russian Mennonite writers look back with nostalgia to the past and become overly emotional in describing their loss. Huebert, trained in the medical sciences, avoids sentimentality and refuses to moralize and judge with regard to the tragic circumstances in which the Russian Mennonites suddenly found themselves. Understanding the historical processes within nineteenth and twentieth century Russia, he describes as objectively as possible the many events, accounts for the historical reasons behind them, and then shows the



effects of these events on the people of Hierschau and elsewhere.

This objectivity, coupled with a detached irony, serves Huebert's purpose well and is most refreshing in Mennonite writing. Even at the end of the narrative where the author stands at the place where his grandparents lie buried, there is no excessive display of emotions, only quiet reverence and clearheaded reflection. The following quotation illustrates this well: "I stood on the ground where, somewhere, my grandfather and grandmother are buried. . . . In my heart I felt close to the spirit of my forebears. I could almost hear the grunt of effort as a plow was held straight in the rich soil. I could almost feel the sweat trickle down the brow with the labour of pitching ripened sheaves of grain onto the *Leiterwagen*. I could almost taste the delicious steaming borscht prepared by the skillful housewife of a busy *Wirtschaft*. . . . That was Hierschau, the example of a rich agricultural heritage, cradled in the framework of a firm belief that God would surely bless his hard working, soil loving children. . . . But in the long term, it had not turned out quite the way Johann Cornies had planned it."

This well written book is to be highly recommended to all those who love to read Mennonite social history either in an attempt to understand their rich heritage or to know what Russian Mennonite life in all its aspects was all about. The lay reader will find the Hierschau story fascinating reading and the Mennonite historian will be surprised to find many details about Russian Mennonite life in this narrative which are generally not included in the standard histories. Facts concerning village life, the climate and weather, horticulture, rotation of crops, activities of children — all this and more is described in great detail and yet with a freshness rarely found in Mennonite historical writing.

We owe a word of commendation and gratitude to Helmut Huebert who in his busy medical work found the time to write the Hierschau story, obviously a labour of love. In his search of and focus upon the life and environment of his ancestors he has not only described the microscopic lives of a few Russian Mennonite villagers, but also opened up and portrayed a world which has shaped and influenced the lives and history of succeeding generations of Mennonites. Mennonite historiography and we the readers are the richer for it.

Harry Loewen  
Chair in Mennonite Studies  
University of Winnipeg



## PREFACE

Why have I written a book about Hierschau, a remote little village in the Ukraine? For a number of reasons.

I am interested in Mennonite history, my own heritage, and needed some vehicle to stimulate more intense study. I wanted to research one specific subject in as much detail as possible to accomplish this goal. Hierschau was chosen because it was my mother's home village, and it was small enough to allow review of even the minutest detail. I had hoped that it would serve as a good example of Russian Mennonite agricultural life, little realizing at the time that this was the very reason for its establishment in the first place.

Attempts have been made, as much as possible, to make this a story of the people of Hierschau. I have frequently referred to specific events involving specific people, rather than describing trends with general comments. I have also included a fair number of short biographies of people who lived and worked in Hierschau. It is the greatest possible compliment to our forefathers to know about them, to be interested enough to find out what really happened, and how this affected their lives. Perhaps it is the most cruel of fates to be completely forgotten, to be wiped off the map of human existence. I have made a specific conscious effort to document various aspects of Hierschau life as completely as possible, and therefore have included information such as lists of those emigrating, and lists of those sent to concentration or labour camps. My hope is that the research for this book has been detailed enough and the end notes voluminous enough to allow others to use the material for family histories or for further enquiries into the life and times of the Mennonites in Russia.

A number of my personal biases will become evident to readers of this book. Being a physician myself, I would of course notice medical information in the source material (and there was much, often in morbid detail). I have included such information in some sections of the book, not only because of my interest, but also because of my strong opinion that it is historically very relevant. Not only may the behaviour of individuals be determined by their state of health at the time, but general trends may be influenced by the expectations of life or death in the community.

In reading history, I myself prefer to be given actual information, hard data if possible. While the opinion of the historian is valuable, my preference is to be given the facts, so that I, at least to some degree, can make up my own mind as to their significance.



I have tried to extend this courtesy to my readers. It must be remembered, of course, that it is impossible to present all the data, and in the choice of what is given, the historian cannot help but bias possible conclusions.

At various points in this book sections of Mennonite history have been included to provide background knowledge and a context within which to discuss specific events. In order to portray Hierschau as an example, one has to know of what it is an example. A fair amount of Russian and even world history is also mentioned. While Hierschau was part of a rather isolated Mennonite colony, initially far from the crossroads of the world, it certainly was affected by what happened in Russia and in the wider world during various stages of its development.

I have had to make a number of decisions as to how to write this book. The chapters are generally arranged chronologically except in one section, BOOK 2, THE GOLDEN AGE, where I pause in time and discuss a number of aspects of village life, then take up the time line again and move on. Documentation has been as accurate as possible, with corroboration from several sources wherever feasible. If there is some room for doubt I have used words such as "likely," "probable" or "possible" to reflect my lack of complete certainty. While absolute consistency has not been observed, the German spelling of names, which was used by the Mennonites at the time, has been favoured. As examples, it is Elisabeth, not Elizabeth, Katharina, not Catherine or Katie. I have made valiant attempts to be as accurate as possible in specific names. Was it Goerz, Goertz or Goertzen? Dirks, Derksen, Doerksen or Duerksen? Even close friends or relatives have sometimes not seemed to know or care, making it almost certain that some errors have occurred. I have chosen not to use diploids in the text of this book, utilizing the "e" instead. This includes names, but also other words such as "*Aeltester*." All non-English words are in italics unless they are in common use in English. With the first use a translation is included, but thereafter it is used alone. A glossary is included at the end of the book for those who may have missed the first definition. Temperatures, distances, weights and measures have been left in the original form in most instances. Current equivalents are given with the first use of each unit, but not thereafter. An extensive chart is included at the end of the book, again for those who have missed or forgotten the modern equivalent value. This policy has been followed in part because I prefer to read a text as close to the original as possible, but also because of a dilemma as to which units to use. Does one

use metric to please Europeans and Canadians, or Imperial to suit the Americans? Conversion to modern measurements is not as easy as it may seem, since many usages varied from country to country (fathom would be an example), and even varied from time to time within Russia itself. In this book no attempt has been made to make corrections relating to changes in the calendar. In most instances the date mentioned in the source material has simply been used without further scrutiny. Where primary sources are quoted, they of course refer to the calendar in use at the time. This is complicated by the fact that after 1918 some Mennonites transposed all their dates to the new calendar, others did not. An explanation of the various calendars is also included at the end of this book.

Readers will notice some repetition in the text. To those who find this an irritation I apologize, but I could think of no other way to make each unit a reasonably complete entity. The discussion of religious life in Hierschau, for example, would not be complete without mentioning *Aeltester* Gerhard Plett, yet his biography would be deficient if I failed to mention Hierschau religious life. I trust that the benefits of occasionally repeating material will outweigh the disadvantages.

Thanks are due to many who have helped to make this book possible. My mother, Mrs. Katharina (Katie) Huebert has endured many hours of close questioning, as have my aunt, Mrs. Maria Wall and my uncle, Johann Willms. Others have cheerfully given information either by direct interview or by letter. Mr. David. J. Duerksen (now deceased) sent me a series of very informative and interesting letters. A group of readers, Professor Harry Loewen of the University of Winnipeg, Associate Professor Abe J. Dueck of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, and David Duerksen of Winnipeg, have been helpful in reviewing the manuscript. I have spent many hours at the archives of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Canada at the Center for M.B. Studies in Winnipeg, and am thankful for the cooperation of the archivist, Ken Reddig.

I trust that "Hierschau: An Example of Russian Mennonite Life" can be of interest to some, a source of information to others, and at least a reasonably accurate (though possibly a bit musty) account of how our forefathers struggled in the faith, to the rest.

Helmut T. Huebert  
Winnipeg, Canada  
May, 1986





# CONTENTS

Foreword . . . . .	v
Preface . . . . .	ix
Contents . . . . .	xiii
List of Tables . . . . .	xvii
List of Maps and Diagrams . . . . .	xviii
List of Illustrations . . . . .	xix
Hierschau: A Chronology . . . . .	xxi
Map: North Eastern Molotschna . . . . .	xxiii
BOOK 1. THE BEGINNING . . . . .	1
CHAPTER I. From the Limmat to the Dniepr . . . . .	3
II. The Molotschna . . . . .	17
III. Hierschau: An Example is Born . . . . .	37
Tobias Sperling . . . . .	54
IV. The Mid-Century Commonwealth . . . . .	57
V. Moving Out . . . . .	83
Johann J. Regier . . . . .	97
Peter Regier . . . . .	101
Jakob L. Loewen . . . . .	104
BOOK 2. THE GOLDEN AGE . . . . .	107
CHAPTER VI. The People . . . . .	109
Gertrude Willms . . . . .	122
VII. The <i>Wirtschaft</i> . . . . .	129
VIII. Religious Life . . . . .	149

Gerhard Plett . . . . .	156
IX. Transportation and Communications . . . . .	163
Heinrich J. Thiessen . . . . .	178
X. The School . . . . .	183
Isaak F. Peters . . . . .	194
Johann A. Goerz . . . . .	199
XI. Hierschau and the World . . . . .	205
Jakob G. Duerksen . . . . .	218
BOOK 3. DISASTER IN UTOPIA . . . . .	223
Russian and World War I:	
Chronology of Events . . . . .	224
CHAPTER XII. War and Revolution . . . . .	229
Hierschau: Chronology of Events . . . . .	242
XIII. Catastrophe . . . . .	247
Heinrich Braun . . . . .	259
XIV. The Famine . . . . .	267
XV. Till We Meet Again . . . . .	281
XVI. All Things Common . . . . .	301
BOOK 4. THE FINAL DIASPORA . . . . .	311
CHAPTER XVII. Blitzkrieg . . . . .	313
The Great Trek: Chronology of Events . . . . .	327
XVIII. The Great Trek . . . . .	329
XIX. Afterwards . . . . .	337
Commonly Used Sources . . . . .	347

End Notes .....	349
Appendices	
Weights and Measures .....	375
Dates and Calendars .....	377
Temperatures .....	379
Colony .....	380
Russo-Turkish Wars .....	381
Czars of Russia .....	382
Glossary .....	383
Index .....	389
Map: Molotschna Colony in 1865 .....	405



## LIST OF TABLES

I	Mennonite Emigration to the Molotschna . . . . .	27
II	Villages founded by Mennonites in the Molotschna .	28
III	Hierschau Pioneers . . . . .	44
IV	Crops in the Molotschna in 1851 . . . . .	51
V	Molotschna Farm Income in 1851 . . . . .	64
VI	Trades and Professions in the Molotschna in 1854 . .	66
VII	Mid-nineteenth Century Molotschna Population Statistics . . . . .	73
VIII	Comparison of Mid-nineteenth Century Molotschna and Canada, 1982, 1983 . . . . .	74
IX	Mid-century Hierschau Statistics . . . . .	75
X	Hierschau Emigration to the United States . . . . .	90
XI	Hierschauer's Emigrating Directly to the United States	91
XII	New Homes in the United States . . . . .	92
XIII	Indirect Hierschau Migration to the United States . .	93
XIV	Rooms in the Johann Willms House . . . . .	132
XV	Hierschau Land Areas . . . . .	137
XVI	Grains, Fruits and Vegetables Grown in Hierschau	138
XVII	Farm Animals of the Johann Willms <i>Wirtschaft</i> . . .	142
XVIII	Hierschau Officials . . . . .	205
XIX	M.C.C. Statistics for the Halbstadt <i>Wolost</i> . . . . .	271
XX	Graph: American Mennonite Relief Statistics regarding Agriculture of the Mennonites in the Ukraine .	271
XXI	Requests for Food Drafts from Hierschau People during the <i>Hungersnot</i> in 1922 . . . . .	272
XXII	List of Families Known to have Moved to Hierschau during the Period of Unrest . . . . .	281
XXIII	Emigration of Mennonites from the Soviet Union .	288
XXIV	People Emigrating from Hierschau in the 1920s . .	289
XXV	Emigration from Hierschau by Year . . . . .	290
XXVI	Farms and Agricultural Operations in the Molotschansk Region in 1928 . . . . .	303
XXVII	Hierschau Families Forced from their Homes, 1930-1931 . . . . .	307
XXVIII	Molotschna Village <i>Dorfkarten</i> and other Information .	318
XXIX	<i>Dorfkarten</i> General Information . . . . .	321
XXX	Occupations of German People . . . . .	322
XXXI	Last Recorded Case of Disease . . . . .	322
XXXII	Land Area . . . . .	323
XXXIII	Hierschau People on the Trek . . . . .	330

## LIST OF MAPS AND DIAGRAMS

North Eastern Molotschna .....	xxiii
Reformation and Anabaptist Europe .....	13
The Molotschna Region .....	19
Villages of the Molotschna: Flemish-Frisian .....	31
Landskrone, Hierschau and Waldheim Landholdings .....	41
Hierschau Original Settlers .....	47
Hierschau Public Works Construction .....	49
Molotschna in 1871 .....	61
Hierschau in 1904 .....	117
Hierschau about 1920 .....	119
The Johann Willms House (using the illustration of Gerhard Lohrenz) .....	131
The Johann Willms Barn and Machine Shed .....	134
The Johann Willms <i>Wirtschaft</i> , No. 30 .....	136
Molotschna Roads, according to Hippenmayer, 1852 .....	165
Railroads in the Molotschna Region (according to Stumpp) ..	171
Taurida, Kherson and Jekaterinoslav .....	209
Eastern Europe June 1914 .....	231
Eastern Europe 1917 and 1918 .....	239
Lower Dniepr June 10, 1920 (using text and map of P.N. Wrangel) .....	251
Molotschna June 20, 1920 (using text and map of P.N. Wrangel) .....	253
Area of Famine in the Soviet Union, 1921-1922 (using Russian History Atlas by Martin Gilbert, pp. 102-103) .....	269
The Johann Willms House August 24, 1926 .....	295
The Eastern Front .....	315
The Great Trek .....	333
Chernigov District .....	339
Hierschau in 1982 .....	343
Molotschna Colony in 1865 (by William Schroeder) .....	405

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Martyrdom of Anneken Heyndriks in Amsterdam in 1571 (from Thielman J. van Braght, <i>Martyrs Mirror</i> , first published in 1660) . . . . .	8
Hierschau Senior Choir . . . . .	111
Cartoon: Irresistible Crow's Nest . . . . .	115
Plett Family Cousins . . . . .	120
Johann and Gertrude Willms (1909). . . . .	125
The Home of Peter Neufeld, <i>Wirtschaft</i> No. 5 . . . . .	130
The Home of Jakob Willms, <i>Wirtschaft</i> No. 6 . . . . .	130
Cartoon: Mennonite Brethren Frogs . . . . .	152
The Choir standing in front of the Landskrone church, probably about 1925 . . . . .	154
The Landskrone church building in 1982 . . . . .	154
<i>Aeltester</i> Gerhard Plett . . . . .	158
<i>Aeltester</i> Gerhard Plett at the funeral of his son, Kornelius . . . . .	159
Wagons commonly used by the Mennonites (from P.M. Friesen, used by permission of Board of Christian Literature) . . . . .	166
Departure for Canada from the Lichtenau Station in 1924 (used by permission of the M.B. Archives of Winnipeg) . . . . .	174
Hierschau school picture in 1902, with teacher Isaak Peters . . . . .	189
School picture taken about 1908, with teacher Abram Bergen . . . . .	190
Cartoon: Keep that finger straight! . . . . .	191
Isaak F. Peters (1931) . . . . .	197
Johann and Helena Goerz on their wedding day, August 19, 1912 . . . . .	200
The Winter Palace, official winter residence of the Czar in St. Petersburg (photograph 1982) . . . . .	215
Czar Nicholas II and his family . . . . .	216
The Jakob Duerksen <i>Wirtschaft</i> , No. 26 . . . . .	219
Jakob and Elisabeth Duerksen . . . . .	221
A <i>Forstei</i> camp near the Urals . . . . .	230
Cartoon: The Communist Soup Kitchen . . . . .	256
Peter and Katharina Dyck . . . . .	297
Emigrants on the deck of the "Empress of Scotland" . . . . .	298
The only remaining original house in Hierschau (all photographs used in Chapter XIX taken by the author in 1982) . . . . .	338
Fragment of old decorative fence . . . . .	338
Wagon on the Hierschau street . . . . .	340
Manure spreader on the way to Waldheim . . . . .	340
A current Hierschau householder . . . . .	342
The general store in Hierschau . . . . .	342

The former boss of the tractor pool, family and friends . . . . 345



## HIERSCHAU: A CHRONOLOGY

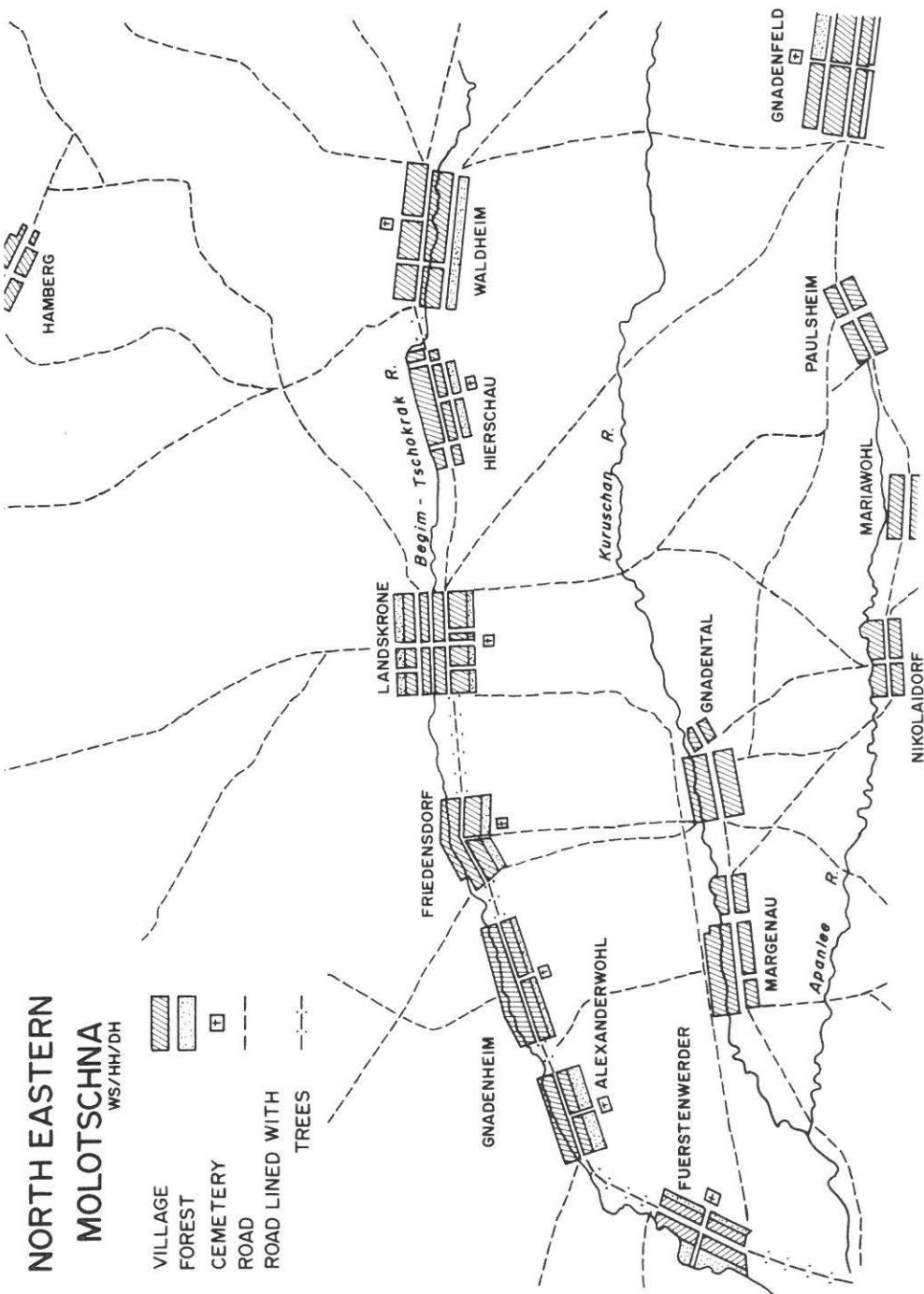
1788	First Mennonite migration to Russia, with establishment of Chortitza Colony in 1789.
1804	Molotschna Colony founded.
Spring, 1848	Hierschau founded by people from the Molotschna. Planned by Cornies. Probably 23 <i>Wirtschaften</i> settled in 1848.
1852	School built.
1860-1862	Migration of at least six families to the Crimea.
1866 and 1869	Land redistribution. Probably some conflict in Hierschau.
1874	Kornelius Regier elected <i>Schulze</i> .
1874-1879	Migration of at least 26 family units consisting of 113 people to the United States.
1890	Jakob G. Duerksen elected <i>Schulze</i> . Became <i>Oberschulze</i> of Gnadenfeld <i>Wolost</i> in 1905.
1908	Gerhard Plett ordained as <i>Aeltester</i> .
August 1, 1914	(July 19 by Old Calendar) Germany declared war on Russia.
November, 1917	Local Soviets came to power, Hierschau likely controlled by Waldheim Soviet.
April 19, 1918	German troops occupied the area.
Summer, 1918	Formation of <i>Selbstschutz</i> . After November, Fuehrer Braun in charge.
March 11, 1919	Red troops occupied the area.
June, 1919	White Army occupied the area.
June 20, 1920	Major battle in Molotschna, with rearguard action around Hierschau.
October 15, 1920	Last White retreat from the area.
1922	Famine in South Russia, including Hierschau.
1920-1930	Migration of at least 26 family units consisting of 115 people, mostly to Canada.
1930-1931	Collectivization in Hierschau. At least 20 families evicted from their homes. Probably became part of Gorki Collective with headquarters in Waldheim.
1936-1938	At least 11 Hierschau men imprisoned during the Purge.
June 22, 1941	German invasion of the Soviet Union.
July-September, 1941	Most men between 16 and 65 deported from Molotschna, including 37 from Hierschau.
October 1, 1941	All Molotschna residents evacuated to railroad

	stations. Those at Stulnewo, including Hierschauers, were not deported.
October 6, 1941	Molotschna occupied by German Army.
September 12, 1943	Evacuation of all Mennonite residents of Hierschau. Start of the Great Trek. Village possibly destroyed by retreating army.
January, 1945	Hierschau residents evacuated to Lower Saxony.
Later 1945	28 Hierschau families decided to return to Soviet Union. Few ever returned to their home village. At least six families stayed in Germany.
After 1945	Hierschau rebuilt, most houses likely in the 1950s and 1960s. No school. No mill. No creamery. Has a general store.
1982	Called Vladovka 2, likely a suburb of Waldheim. Few Mennonites remain in the area.

# NORTH EASTERN MOLOTSCHNA

WS/HH/DH

- VILLAGE
- FOREST
- CEMETERY
- ROAD
- ROAD LINED WITH TREES





## BOOK 1. THE BEGINNING

Hierschau is a village founded in 1848 as an expansion of the Molotschna Mennonite Colony in south Russia. To understand the circumstances of its establishment and the factors which influenced its development, it is essential to outline Mennonite history up to that time. This will help us to determine who the people were that made up this Mennonite community, what brought them to the steppes of south Russia, and in some instances why they acted as they did. Since the essential mainspring of Mennonite existence throughout the centuries has been the understanding and experience of the church, to a large extent this account will be a review of Anabaptist-Mennonite church history. We will follow the stream of events leading from Zurich to the Netherlands, then from there to northern Germany and Poland, and on to Russia. There were many other important and fascinating developments in Anabaptist-Mennonite history which will not be mentioned, simply because they are not in the chain of events which eventually led to the founding of Hierschau.

The Molotschna Colony in Russia is described in considerable detail, and eventually the founding of Hierschau as part of the expansion of this region. Planned by Johann Cornies as an example, Hierschau rapidly took its place in the Mennonite Commonwealth of southern Russia, participating in the development, but also suffering from some of the problems of the time.

Just when it appeared that the internal conflicts were near resolution, external circumstances forced themselves into the Mennonite consciousness. Despite earlier promises of eternal privileges, political reality brought some of these to an end in the 1870s. Those Mennonites who could not tolerate this impingement on their freedoms, chose to again continue their pilgrimage, this time to America. Among these was a sizeable contingent from Hierschau.



# I FROM THE LIMMAT TO THE DNIEPR

## The Reformation

The medieval Roman Catholic church dominated almost all aspects of European life. Controlled by a papacy based in Rome, it certainly was catholic in that it was all-inclusive and universal. Ever since the time of Emperor Constantine (325 A.D.), when the Christian church became the favoured, even the state religion, church and state had become inseparably intertwined. But rather than society becoming more Christian through this alliance, the church became ever more secular.<sup>1</sup> Despite occasional attempts at reform, corruption was common. Ecclesiastical positions could be bought and sold; repentance was often on a "pay now, sin later" plan, through the purchase of indulgences. The life style of the clergy in many instances gave evidence of very little religious training, interest, or commitment. The research of Renaissance scholars had discovered that several documents upon which the secular power of the church was based were blatant forgeries; even so, the church did not feel inclined to relinquish this ill-gotten advantage. In most countries church and state were closely linked, so that secular rulers considered it part of their job description to institute, with brutal force when necessary, the beliefs of the established church. By 1500 many rulers, for example those of France and Spain, were in virtual control of the church in their territories.

In many ways it seemed that the church was probably the most blatantly secular in Italy, the seat of the Papacy, and perhaps the least pagan in Germany. Even so, Martin Luther, a German monk, found the frenzy of masses, psalters and rosary prayers distracting when he tried to study his Bible. He discovered that the teaching and the practice of the church did not jibe with what he found in the Scriptures. Finally the unscrupulous sale of indulgences in his neighbourhood drove him to openly challenge this practice. On October 31, 1517, he nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the university church in Wittenberg. The document was translated into German, and through the means of the recently introduced printing press was soon distributed far and wide. Rapidly following events led to a complete break with the Roman Catholic Church and the formation of a separate reformed state church.

Once the flames of reform flickered, the brush fires spread rapidly; the dogma and the power of the church were challenged in a number of centres throughout Europe. Ulrich Zwingli began as a humanist, but after study of the New Testament newly edited by Erasmus, decided to preach nothing but the true gospel as he found

it in the Bible. As the peoples' priest at the *Grossmuenster* in Zurich, he led a reform movement in that city which started to gain momentum by 1522. While his preaching and teaching were based on the Word of God, Zwingli still made certain that the actual reforms had the legal support of the Zurich city council.

### Anabaptist Beginnings

A small group of keen students was drawn to Zwingli; they were humanists, at first mainly interested in the study of the Greek classics. Together with Zwingli they became interested in reform of the church. Some members of this group became disenchanted when it became obvious that reforms seemingly dictated by the Word of God were tempered by what could be accepted by the Zurich city council. In October, 1523, Conrad Grebel and Simon Stumpf openly opposed Zwingli's appeal to the council regarding images in the church and the mass.<sup>2</sup>

On January 17, 1525, a further disputation was held between Zwingli and some of his more radical students, turned critics.<sup>3</sup> Infant baptism was the main subject of discussion, and despite the obvious religious nature of the topic, the city council was again chosen as the final arbiter. Zwingli was declared the winner and his critics, the radicals, were denounced. This debate precipitated the final break between the students and their erstwhile mentor.

On January 21, 1525, just a few days after the disputation, about a dozen men met for Bible study at the home of Felix Manz. Georg Blaurock asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him; Georg then baptized all the others present at the meeting.<sup>4</sup> It was probably not recognized at the time, but with this act of what they took to be simple obedience to the Word of God, Anabaptism (the word means to baptize again) was born. Baptism to them was not a routine procedure perpetrated on an infant, but a conscious pledge to be a true disciple of Christ, to live a life separated from the world. Those present felt that the church was to be modeled after the New Testament pattern, not controlled by what councils or governments allowed. Personal commitment to Christ was necessary for salvation and for baptism; the church was a voluntary group of believers.

The major reformers such as Luther and Zwingli had come to recognize deficiencies or error in the dogma of the Catholic church, as well as in the resultant practice. With reform, however, they had seen the solution only in terms of setting up a new, though still somewhat similar structure. The reformed theology might more accurately reflect *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), but in practical



terms the organization of the church was much the same. For both the Catholics and the newly emerging Protestants, church and state were inseparably linked. In reality this meant that the state enforced the regulations of the church. Though sometimes lamenting the fact, neither Catholic nor the major Protestant groups really expected theology to affect the life style of their adherents materially; discipleship was only for a chosen few.<sup>5</sup>

The Anabaptists felt that Zwingli had not gone far enough in his reforms. He had not followed Biblical principles to their logical conclusions, and was far too willing to let political considerations control the fervor of reform.<sup>6</sup> They believed in a new order, in a congregation which was a community of true disciples of Christ, baptized on their own volition. To both Catholics and Protestants these ideas appeared to be very radical, even threatening, and undoubtedly dangerous.<sup>7</sup> Rebaptism was classed together with sedition, anarchy, blasphemy and sacrilege to be called treason, and therefore a crime against church and state.<sup>8</sup> Such a heinous act was punished by imprisonment, often torture and not infrequently death.

### Early Anabaptist Leaders

Conrad Grebel was one of the leaders of the original Zurich group of radicals, and was the first to perform the ordinance of adult baptism. Despite poor health and periods of imprisonment, his brief time of visiting and preaching was very effective. He died of the plague in 1526.

The home of Felix Manz was the meeting place of the Bible study which led to the first baptism of believers. Together with Georg Blaurock, Manz worked mainly in the Zurich area. After being imprisoned a number of times, he had the dubious distinction of being the first Anabaptist to be executed by Protestants. This sentence was carried out, by drowning, in the Limmat River on January 5, 1527.<sup>9</sup>

Georg Blaurock was a Catholic priest who joined the Anabaptist group, and was the first to be rebaptized. At the time when Manz was executed, Blaurock was beaten and expelled from Zurich. He worked effectively in other Swiss cities, then after further banishment continued his labours in the Tyrol. He was imprisoned, then burned at the stake on September 6, 1529.<sup>10</sup>

Michael Sattler, another of the early group who was expelled from Zurich, eventually went to Strasbourg, then to Horb in Germany. He preached at Schleithem and probably drew up what later became known as the Schleithem Confession. Soon

thereafter he was accused of numerous crimes and imprisoned. Despite a very able defence, he was tortured horribly, then burned at the stake on May 20, 1527.

Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier, a well trained theologian, came into contact with the Swiss reformers and even participated in the disputation in Zurich in 1523. He returned to his parish at Waldshut to launch a similar program of reform. Trying to reproduce the New Testament church brought him into conflict with the Austrian authorities, and eventually Hubmaier had to flee to the protection of the more tolerant Moravia. Throughout his time of work he published books and pamphlets, which had influence far beyond his time and place. When Austrian domination spread to Moravia, Hubmaier was imprisoned, and after torture was burned at the stake on March 10, 1528.

Missionary zeal, as well as in some instances banishment from their own homes, spread the Anabaptist radicals into many parts of Switzerland, south Germany, Moravia and into the Tyrol. Michael Sattler, Wilhelm Reublin and Hans Denck worked extensively in southern Germany. Pilgram Marpeck, an engineer, was active in Rattenberg, Strasbourg and Augsburg. In spite of severe persecution, Anabaptism spread rapidly. Many of the early leaders were executed, but others took up the work and often suffered a similar fate. Swabia hired four hundred special police to hunt down and execute Anabaptists. The task was too large, so the number of policemen was increased to one thousand.<sup>11</sup>

The idea of a believers' church likely sprang up in a number of areas of Europe, not necessarily directly connected with the Zurich Anabaptists. Sometimes it is difficult to be certain exactly where a concept did originate, but by 1530 Anabaptist ideas had reached the Netherlands, especially the northern province of Frisia, and also northern Germany. Melchior Hoffman came into contact with Anabaptists in Strasbourg and was baptized in 1530. Working mainly in Emden, he also travelled extensively in the Netherlands and northern Germany, baptizing many believers as he went. His preaching contained increasing chiliastic (end time) speculations, and finally he became so convinced that Strasbourg would be the New Jerusalem that he had himself imprisoned there. He died in a Strasbourg cell about 10 years later, in 1543.

Muenster, a city in northern Germany, was strongly influenced by Anabaptist reform, but then was taken over in 1534 by Jan Matthis and Jan of Leyden. These two proclaimed themselves as prophets of God, and wanted to fulfill God's eschatological plans themselves, by force if necessary. Unfortunately the plans of God

did not seem to coincide with those of his self appointed generals. Muenster was besieged by Catholic forces, and fell June 24, 1535, with considerable loss of life.<sup>12</sup>

Many Anabaptists in the Netherlands and northern Germany had not been swept away by the eschatological speculation and fervor of Muenster, as a matter of fact they decried any use of force in the work of the Kingdom of God. Obbe and Dirk Philips emphasized a more balanced biblical Anabaptism, including a Christ-like life style, which by its very nature opposed violence. Obbe Philips was a surgeon and barber, and in the course of his ministry baptized his brother Dirk and the newly converted priest, Menno Simons. Dirk Philips probably had some theological training since he was well versed in Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He wrote well, and had considerable influence among the Anabaptists.

## Menno Simons

Menno Simons, born 1496 in the Frisian village of Witmarsum, was ordained to the priesthood in 1524. He came to recognize that his life as a priest was a hollow sham; Bible study and observation of the staunch faith of the Anabaptists, even in persecution unto death, convinced him of the truth of their beliefs. He made a public statement of his Anabaptist stance on January 30, 1536, and was ordained to the ministry in 1537. Menno's efforts on behalf of his newly found faith were so successful that the Catholic authorities offered a reward for anyone who would deliver him into their hands. No one claimed this reward. Even so, Menno and his family lived many years as fugitives, seldom spending much time in one place. He first ministered in the Groningen area, then around Amsterdam; late in 1543 he left for the more tolerant atmosphere of northern Germany. Menno Simons spent considerable effort even as a priest, then as an Anabaptist minister, emphasizing the peaceful nature of the church, trying to stem the tide of the violence which led to Muenster.<sup>13</sup> Despite the reward on his head, he travelled widely, preaching and teaching wherever he went. He was involved in a number of disputations, representing the Anabaptist point of view. He wrote extensively; *Foundations of Christian Doctrine*, which he published in 1540, was a popular book which outlined much of his Anabaptist belief. He also strove for unity among the Anabaptists; despite bitter persecution, the diverse and fiercely independent groups made this a difficult task. Menno was soon recognized as one of the leaders among the Anabaptists so that in some areas they became known as Mennists or Mennonites. Menno died on January 31, 1561, exactly 25 years



Martyrdom of Anneken Heyndricks in Amsterdam in 1571

after his renunciation of Catholicism. He was buried in his own garden in Wuestenfelde.<sup>14</sup>

### Tenets of Faith

What did the Anabaptists believe that labelled them as such rabid radicals, and what was important enough to them to die for? We have mentioned some of the leaders, many of whom died for their faith, but many others suffered similar, though less well recorded fates. Altogether perhaps 1500 to 2500 died for their beliefs, many experiencing cruel torture before the final execution. The Anabaptists were considered to be so dangerous, that even recantation in some instances only changed the method of execution from the painful fires of the stake to the more expeditious beheading!<sup>15</sup>

Often, particularly in Zurich, the Anabaptists were part of the early Protestant Reformation, but then found that most reformers stopped well short of the Biblical ideal. Insistence on a more radical departure from the old ways has labelled them the Radical Refor-

mation, or the left wing of the Reformation. Though there was considerable diversity of doctrine and practice, most shared a number of basic principles which slowly became more regulated and organized.

Anabaptists believed strongly that the Bible was the Word of God, to be taken seriously; many passages, particularly in the New Testament, were to be taken literally. This meant that having accepted belief in God through the atoning death of Jesus Christ, a life of dedicated discipleship (*Nachfolge*) as outlined in the Scriptures, naturally followed.<sup>16</sup> While salvation was through faith, the everyday behavior of the Anabaptists was most often exemplary. During severe persecution they might be accused of crimes such as treason, but it was often freely admitted that their personal lives left little to be desired.

Love, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace were commanded in the Sermon on the Mount. True followers of Christ could therefore not bear arms, even in self-defence. At a time when the Turks were threatening Christendom, this sounded a lot like "Better Turkish than dead." A number of Anabaptists were, on this basis, executed for treason.

Speech and action were to be truthful, and did not require the emphasis of swearing. While the Bible was the final rule, and faith in Christ was the key to salvation, life was lived through the power of the Holy Spirit, who led both individuals and the congregations in their path of *Nachfolge*.

The true nature of the Church, according to the Anabaptists, should be modeled after the New Testament example. The Church consisted of true voluntary believers, baptized on the basis of their faith in Christ. This tenet therefore denied the validity of infant baptism, since only adults, who had reached the age of accountability, could claim such faith. In many regions of Europe baptism became the hallmark of the movement; the label "Anabaptist" referred to the rebaptism required by this group as the only real believer's baptism. Refusal of parents to have their infants baptized often alerted authorities to the presence of these dangerous radicals.

With a membership consisting of baptized disciples of Christ, it became obvious that the state had no place in the prayer chambers of the church. This demand for absolute separation of Church and State was at the time a very revolutionary idea, both to the Catholics and the major Protestant reformers. To a society for centuries numbed into submission by the all-powerful Church-State conglomerate, this idea seemed to lead to nothing but anarchy.

Within the Anabaptist groups there was a strong emphasis on community and brotherhood; individuals came to God with their fellow believers (*Gemeinde*). This fellowship of believers enabled them to support and help each other, but it also meant that they felt responsible for each other. Admonition and brotherly discipline were not only allowed according to the Scriptures, but commanded.<sup>17</sup>

Among the early Anabaptists there was also a strong emphasis on evangelism. In part because of a desire to share their beliefs, and to some degree forced to move by severe persecution, Anabaptists spread rapidly to many parts of Europe, preaching and baptizing wherever they went. Conrad Grebel had a brief but effective ministry, often witnessing from house to house.<sup>18</sup> Georg Blaurock worked in many areas of Switzerland and the Tyrol. Balthasar Hubmaier, Wilhelm Reublin, Michael Sattler, Hans Denck, Hans Hut, Melchior Hoffman and Menno Simons are just a few of those whose evangelistic fervor touched many people in widespread areas. Leenaert Bouwens, a Dutch Anabaptist, baptized a total of 10,252 believers during his ministry!<sup>19</sup>

### The Netherlands, Northern Germany and Poland

The serious way in which the Anabaptists viewed the Bible meant that its interpretation and implementation in life was to be taken seriously. This not only meant a radical departure from Catholic dogma and practice, also taking them well beyond many mainline reformers, but also led to considerable diversity within their own ranks. Menno Simons expended much time and energy pleading for unity within the body of believers. Despite his efforts the more liberal Anabaptists separated from the more extreme in 1555, and became known as Waterlanders. As mentioned previously, most Anabaptist groups eventually became known as Mennonites (and hereafter I will refer to them as Mennonites), but the Waterlander group rejected this name and called itself *Doopsgezinden* (Baptizers). The purity of the church long continued to be a particularly divisive issue, as well as the use of the ban to enforce this purity.

After the death of Menno Simons the leadership of the Dutch Mennonites fell to the stern and more rigid Dirk Philips, then after his death in 1568 to the widely known evangelist, Leenaert Bouwens. While persecution was still severe, execution for the faith became less common, the last recorded Dutch martyr dying in 1574.<sup>20</sup>

Anabaptism had taken root in Flanders after Melchior Hoffman



travelled through the area; despite persecution the movement had a steady growth, particularly from about 1550 to 1576. With continued Spanish control of the southern Lowlands, however, and persistent severe repression by the Duke of Alva, Flemish refugees fled to England, to the northern Lowlands and as far east as Danzig. Eventually most of the Mennonites left Flanders, a considerable number having sought the greater freedom of the Dutch provinces to the north, particularly Frisia. When they moved, they took their own modes and customs with them, therefore two distinct groups of Mennonites developed in this area. The Flemish, consisting mainly of the new refugees, tended to be quick tempered and emotional; they enjoyed good food and fine clothing. The Frisians, native to the area, were more reserved, not as concerned with clothing, though they did have fine household goods and linens.<sup>21</sup> Attempts at reconciliation of these two groups failed, and so this division was carried eastward to Prussia and was even transplanted into the Russian colonies.

Partly because of the repressive measures instituted in the Lowlands, Menno Simons and many other Mennonites were forced to flee the area, finding a haven in the more tolerant regions of northeast Germany.<sup>22</sup> Mennonite fellowships spread throughout northern Germany, as far east as Danzig and Koenigsberg. Generally speaking their survival in a locality depended on the severity of persecution; if the repression was too brutal and sustained, most either died as martyrs or simply moved to more tolerant regions of Europe.

Many Mennonites settled on the estates of sympathetic noblemen in the Schleswig-Holstein area, where the land was marshy and industrious farmers were needed. Similar conditions prevailed further east in the Vistula Delta region where marshy land also required the expertise and hard work of dedicated Mennonite farmers. With reasonable religious tolerance in the city of Danzig and among the nobility who had large estates in the area, a large number of Mennonites came to the Vistula Delta in the 1530s and onwards. The cost to the first generations of Mennonites was high, many dying of swamp fever (malaria). Yet with persistent hard work, frugality, and common goals added to their skill in changing swampy marshes into fertile farmland, they soon turned the areas bordering the Vistula and Nogat rivers into flourishing communities. Though originally mostly farmers, the Mennonites also became increasingly involved in the business and cultural life of the major cities of the region. By the middle of the eighteenth century they were active in virtually every occupation; they were

merchants, manufacturers, bankers, craftsmen, brewers or town labourers.<sup>23</sup>

It was in this delta triangle that the Mennonites first developed an ethnic identity. Religious beliefs were consolidated, economic communities developed, even a common language, Low German (*Plautdietsch*), was accepted and modified as it became the everyday working language. The tenacity with which Mennonites clung to some of their tenets of faith also extended to the official language used in the church. It was not until well into the eighteenth century that High German replaced Dutch in the church services in the Danzig area.<sup>24</sup>

A number of Polish kings reaffirmed the original privileges granted the Mennonites when they had first arrived, and John III in 1694 assured them that this applied to the entire Mennonite community. August III in 1750 again confirmed the privileges, including the provision that Mennonites did not have to bear arms, though this was compensated for by the demand for payment of higher taxes.<sup>25</sup> Tolerance, however, was not quite as hearty in all localities. Prosperity in the Mennonite areas brought them respect for their industry and skill, but also generated envy and resentment among their neighbours. This was translated into regulations which limited the citizenship, curbed the religious development (for example, it was not until the eighteenth century that Mennonites were allowed to build churches), and restricted further expansion of the Mennonite communities. A few Mennonites were given citizenship in Elbing, but in the city of Danzig they were not granted this privilege until the nineteenth century. Despite these difficulties, church centres were established around Danzig and Elbing, further south into Poland and east toward Koenigsberg.

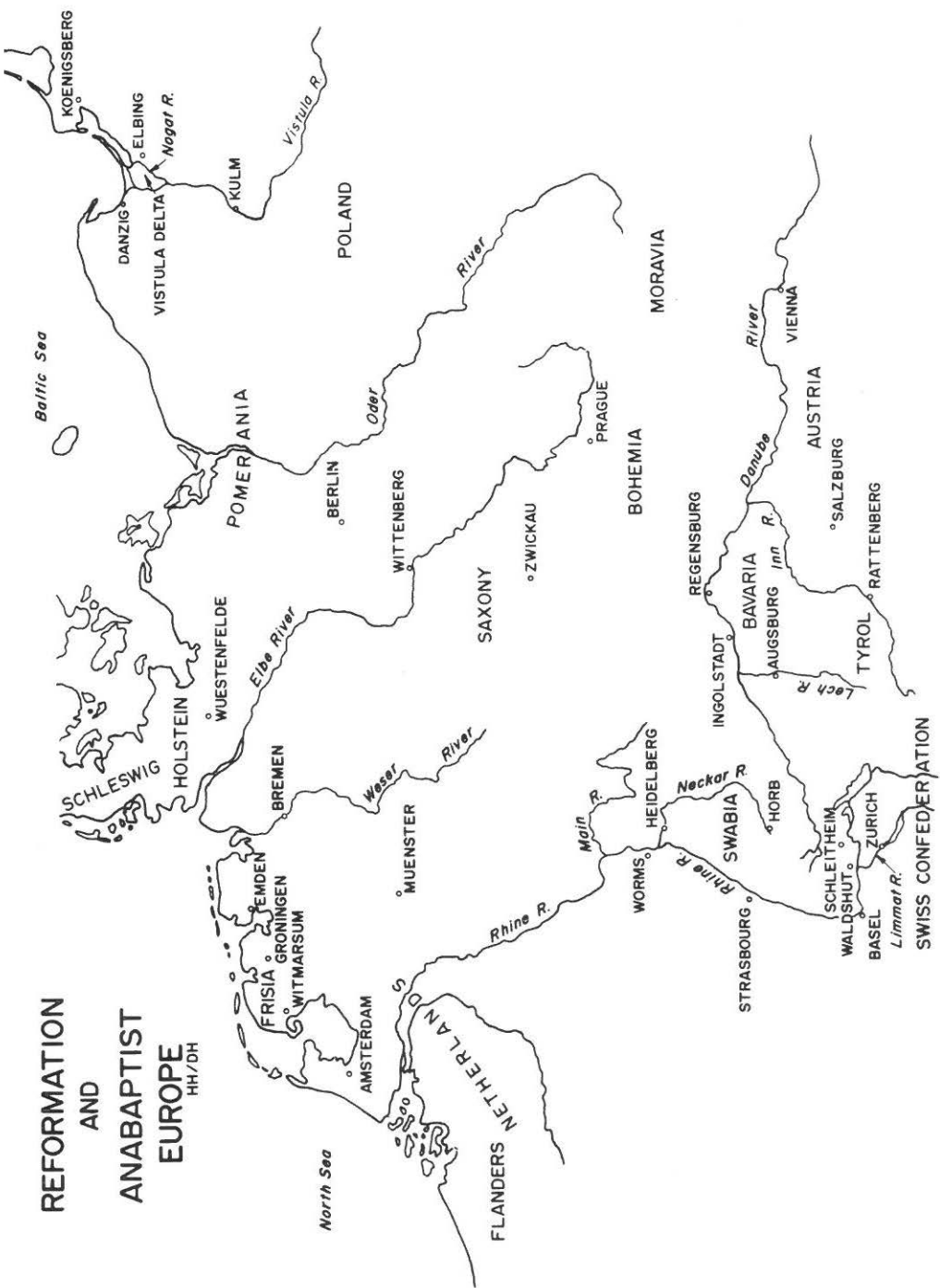
## Prussia

With the first partition of Poland in 1772, much of the area in which the Mennonites lived on the Vistula Delta was transferred to the sovereignty of Prussia, under King Frederick the Great. The Mennonite church sent a delegation to Potsdam to submit a petition to the king requesting continuation of their previous privileges. Exemption from military service was guaranteed for all time on the condition that they pay an additional 5000 thaler annually for the upkeep of the cadet school at Kulm. This was agreed to.

While on the one hand the privileges granted the Mennonites were continued in recognition of their considerable contribution to the development of the area, the government did view further expansion of their communities with some alarm. Restrictions were



# REFORMATION AND ANABAPTIST EUROPE HH/DH



enacted prohibiting Mennonites from buying further portions of land from anyone other than of their own faith without permission from the authorities. Mennonite families were large and the system of land-holding made it difficult to subdivide existing tracts of land among children, so despite these regulations, the purchase of new areas of land continued. Officials recorded 296 new purchases between 1781 and 1784.

Frederick William II succeeded his father to the Prussian throne in 1786, and when the Mennonites appealed for re-affirmation of their previous charter, he continued the exemption from military service, but denied the right to purchase any new land. An edict was issued on July 30, 1789, confirming that Mennonites in Prussia could buy no more land except from other Mennonites; they also had to pay additional taxes, some of which were diverted to the Lutheran Church. Somewhat later steps were taken actually to reduce the land possessions of the Mennonites. Persons with non-Mennonite parents who had recently joined the church were excluded from the military exemption.<sup>26</sup>

### The Russian Option

While restrictions were beginning to worry the Mennonites in Prussia, developments in Russia seemed to provide an answer to their problems. Czarina Catherine II of Russia published a manifesto in 1763 inviting foreign colonists to help settle the lands recently wrested from the Turkish empire. Recognizing that Mennonite farmers might be ideal pioneers in the wide open steppes of South Russia, Catherine dispatched a special envoy to visit them. In the summer of 1786 George von Trappe visited the Mennonites in the Danzig area to interest them in the project; he found an attentive audience. He challenged them to consider Russia as their second homeland:

. . . where to a much greater degree than in France, foreigners may exercise their freedom of conscience and live in unhindered peace. There is not another monarch in the world who has done more for foreigners than the miracle of this century, Russia's wise ruler, Catherine the Great. In twenty-five unforgettable years she has exhibited toleration and beneficence, has helped and continues to help them to this day.<sup>27</sup>

The Mennonites sent two men, Jacob Hoepfner and Johann Bartsch, to investigate the situation. Assisted by Major Meier, who had been appointed by Prince Gregor Potempkin, then governor

general of New Russia, these two delegates inspected a large area of the southern part of New Russia throughout the winter of 1786 to 1787. They selected a region of land on the lower Dniepr River, fairly close to the newly established city of Kherson. The site had good soil, excellent pasture and water supplies, and access to nearby markets.

In April, 1787, Hoeppner and Bartsch outlined their requests to the Russian authorities. The Mennonites wanted recognition of their religious freedom. No military service was to be required, and no quartering of troops in their villages. Each family was to receive 65 dessiatines (one dessiatine is 1.092 hectares or 2.7 acres) of land, together with hay, wood and fishing rights. The land was to be properly surveyed, and the government was to guarantee protection for the settlements. Funds were required for food and transport; loans would be needed until the first crop was harvested, as well as a ten year exemption from taxes. The decree agreeing to these terms was drawn up in August, 1787, was signed by Catherine the Great and the Russian Chancellor Bezborodko, then made public in September.<sup>28</sup>

The trip was complicated by an accident in which Hoeppner broke his leg (probably his ankle) just before they reached St. Petersburg. The two delegates were forced to stay at the imperial capital seven weeks until the leg was sufficiently healed to allow further travel.<sup>29</sup>

George von Trappe accompanied Hoeppner and Bartsch back to Danzig where they were met with great enthusiasm. Many families applied to emigrate, the first group of six families leaving in 1787. With emigration a reality, the local Danzig and Prussian authorities strongly opposed the move despite their previous restrictive measures. The trickle which began in 1787 continued, with another four families leaving in February, 1788, then seven more in March. By the autumn of 1788 a total of 288 families arrived at Dubrovna in Russia. This place on Potempkin's estate was where the Mennonites wintered, then in spring continued their journey. Travel was difficult and shortages common. Since many of the early emigrants were poor artisans and landless people, they required monetary assistance, but funds easily promised by the Russian government were harder to come by when they were actually needed. Hoeppner and Bartsch were informed, during the trip, that the original site planned for settlement was now too close to the region of hostilities with the Turks, and that the Mennonites would have to settle on a substitute area on the Dniepr River called Chortitza. It is possible that another outbreak in the long series of

wars with Turkey had not been foreseen, but it is remarkable that the substitute area suggested just happened to be part of the private estate of Potempkin, who was arranging the establishment of colonies in New Russia. The Mennonites did not welcome this change, particularly since Chortitza did not measure up to the lowlands that Hoepfner and Bartsch had first carefully selected.

The settlers arrived at their new homeland in July, 1789, first setting up tents, some under the large oak tree near the Dniepr River, then moving to their villages. Most of the original emigrants were from the Danzig area, and were predominantly Flemish. By 1797 a total of about 400 families<sup>30</sup> had left their Prussian homeland to settle on the broad steppes of south Russia. Eight villages were established by 1790 (Chortitza, Rosental, Insel Chortitza, Einlage, Neuenburg, Schoenhorst, Neuendorf and Alt Kronsweide) with Krongarten and Schoenwiese being founded in 1797. Reports from 1820 record another five villages, now totalling 15, with 560 families and 2888 individuals. In 1824 three more villages were established, making a total of 18.

Specific motivation for the emigration from Prussia to Russia undoubtedly varied considerably. The poor artisans and the landless saw an opportunity to start a new life. Others emigrated because limitations to the expansion of Mennonite communities in Prussia stifled any further chances of advancement. Some left because they saw the slowly increasing repressive measures encroaching on their freedom, including religious freedom. In Russia the Mennonites hoped to find the absolute in religious freedom, preferring to set up closed, self-regulating communities of believers. These communities, they hoped, could be based upon Christian ideals, and allow for proper moral, spiritual and economic development.<sup>31</sup> With the wide open, almost boundless south Russian steppes as operational homeland, there should really be no hindrance to the development of flourishing Christian communities for countless ages to come.

## II THE MOLOTSCHNA

After the initial surge of Mennonite migration, events in Prussia and Russia seemed to conspire together to increase the use of this escape mechanism. On December 17, 1801 Frederick William III of Prussia not only confirmed the edict of 1789, but interpreted it more strictly; further restrictions were added in the following years. In Russia, on the other hand, David Epp and Gerhard Willms travelled to St. Petersburg to obtain additional assurance of the imperial privileges originally granted the Mennonites. After a wait of more than two years they received the signed document from Czar Paul I on October 28, 1800. In gold print it not only confirmed, but extended their privileges:

In order to authenticate our most gracious grant in response to the petition received by us from the Mennonites settled in the New Russian provinces, who, according to the testimony of their supervisors and because of their outstanding industry and commendable way of life, can serve as an example to the others settled there, and who, because of this, have become deserving of our special attention, we have, in this charter of privileges granted to them, not only affirmed all the rights and privileges previously agreed to, but have also, in order to encourage their thrift and concern for agriculture still more, graciously granted them additional rights. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The Mennonites and their descendants were granted religious freedom, were allotted 54 dessiatines per family, and were allowed to establish businesses as well as brew beer, vinegar and brandy. They would not be forced to serve in the military or the civil service, would not have to quarter military troops and could use their own inheritance practices. There would be fifteen years exemption from imperial taxes, and there was an order for all authorities to uphold these privileges.<sup>2</sup>

With an increasing challenge to the existence of the Mennonite communities in Prussia, and the obvious welcome to become "model farmers for the surrounding peoples in agriculture and industry,"<sup>3</sup> it is not surprising that more emigrants were soon on their way to New Russia. In 1803, 193 families consisting of 1,020 individuals left the Elbing and Marienburg districts of Prussia.<sup>4</sup> The settlers stopped in the Chortitza colony over the winter, then together with additional immigrants who arrived in the spring,

moved onto their designated tract of land bordering the Molochnaya River in 1804. (Hereafter the river will be referred to by the Russian name *Molochnaya*, the Mennonite colony, named after the river, by the Germanized version *Molotschna*.)

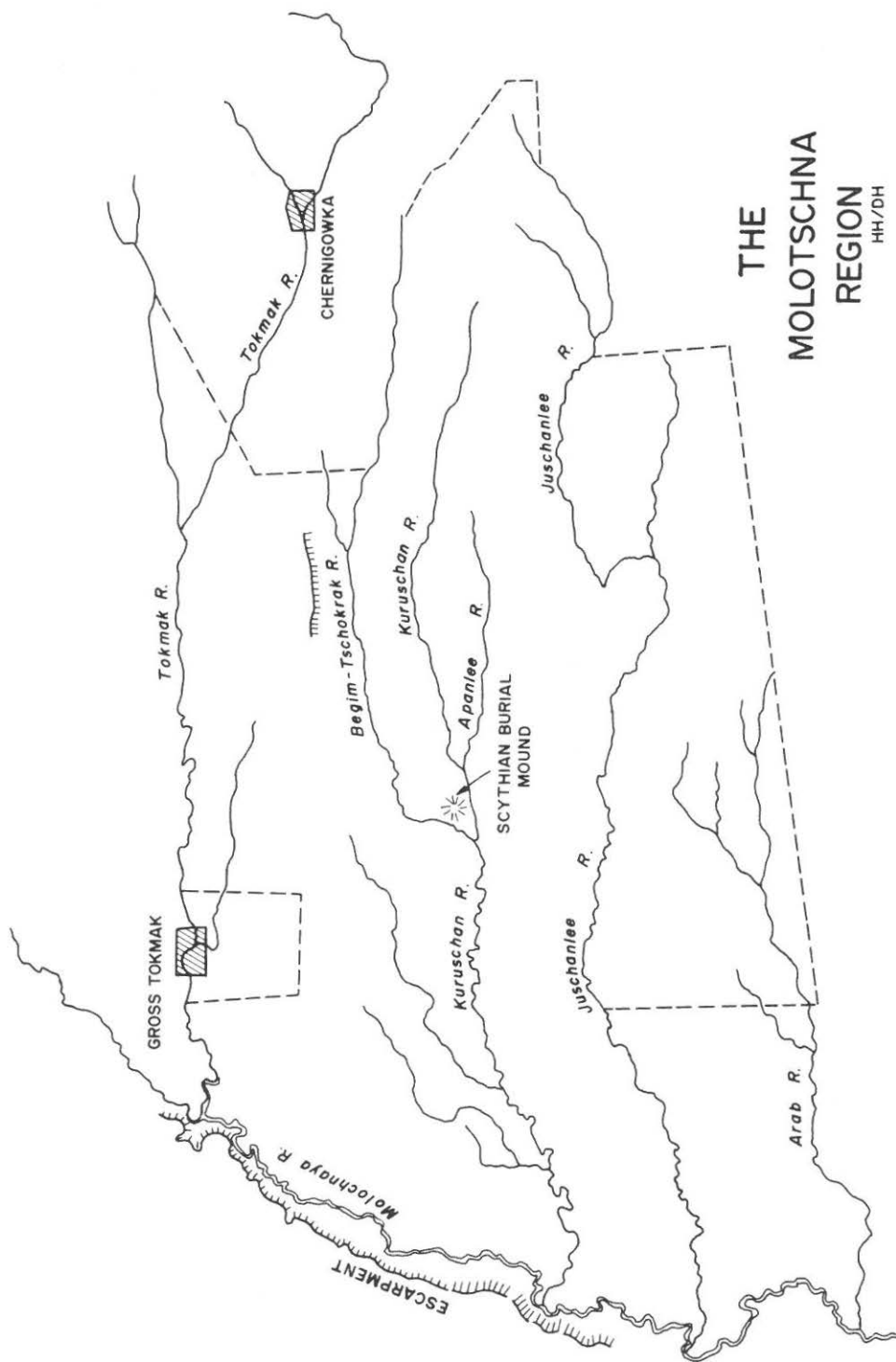
## The Land

The original land chosen by Hoeppner and Bartsch for the first Mennonite settlement had much of what would be ideal for the establishment of a new colony. Proximity to towns and ports to serve as markets, land which had good soil but was not too hilly, adequate pasturage with access to water, and woodland where timber could be acquired, were among the characteristics desired. Unfortunately the first group was forced to accept much less than the ideal circumstances in the Chortitza. The new tract of land the Mennonites obtained for the colony<sup>5</sup> to be established in 1804, was 75 werst (one werst is 1.067 kilometres or .66 miles) south and east of the Chortitza in the province of Taurida. This area of 120,000 dessiatines, on the left bank of the Molochnaya River, also did not meet all the ideal requirements. The land had good soil, was not too hilly, but water was in short supply and the wide open steppe was almost totally devoid of trees.

The Molochnaya River, which could flood in spring, yet would be classed a small rivulet in dry season, formed the western boundary of the new colony. It flowed south into the Sea of Azov. Flowing from east to west a series of tributaries joined the Molochnaya River. Forming the northern boundary of the "chosen land" was the Tokmak, then further south was the Kuruschan (Kuruduschan) with its tributaries Begim-Tshokrak and Apanlee, while the Juschanlee was even further south. A few tributaries of the Arab River originated in the southern reaches of the Molotschna Colony.

On the right bank, that is on the west side of the Molochnaya River, was a slight escarpment, a significant elevation only because on the flat steppes of South Russia every small undulation was a feature to be noted. In the Molotschna itself there were only gentle hills, for example the elevated area just north of the Begim-Tschokrak River. There was often a slight slope to the land, especially near the rivers, to the extent that the gardens on the lower side of the village street might be more productive, having a marginally better supply of water.

Soils in New Russia varied considerably, but were much the same throughout the Molotschna. The base was yellow clay, the surface being covered by a thick layer of "black largely sand free,



THE  
MOLOTSCHNA  
REGION  
HH/DH

fertile topsoil up to 1½ arshin (one arshin is 71 cm. or 28 inches) thick.”<sup>5</sup> Others describe the humus as a very deep layer, light and easy to plow.<sup>6</sup>

The virgin flat steppes were virtually treeless, and covered mainly by grass. What trees there were, mainly ash and oak, grew along the rivers in the northern areas of the Molotschna.<sup>7</sup> Grass was tall, as high as a man in some areas. Its growth and type was described later as being “much the same throughout the district. In areas of slight elevation there is shorter and sparser growth than on the flat plains and valleys. The principal grass is the *Boksbart*, a good meadow grass for all types of cattle. . . .”<sup>8</sup> Grass alone, or grass mixed with animal dung, provided essential fuel for the early Mennonite settlers; hay was needed to feed the farm animals. Much the same as on the Canadian prairie, fast moving grass fires were an occasional hazard to the settlers.

## The Climate

The climate had a distinctly continental flavour, with extremes being common. Without the modern conveniences of thermostats and triple-paned windows, the elements played a much more important role in the day to day lives of the people. The weather figured prominently in the reports of the Molotschna to various publications, and this is quite understandable, since the economic well-being of the agricultural community depended to a large extent on the whims of temperature and precipitation.

Summer temperatures were usually 16-20°R (Reaumur temperature scale was used<sup>9</sup>), though occasionally there was blistering heat. Both Halbstadt and Ohrloff reported maximum temperatures of 31°R (about 39°C or 102°F) in July of 1850.<sup>10</sup> Combined with dry winds, the heat sometimes resulted in severe droughts.<sup>11</sup> Extremes in temperature were often accompanied by severe storms, with winds that had the wide open steppes to gather speed on. In summer “severe storms came from the east, setting in after spring seeding. They darkened the air with dust and earth to such an extent that the sun was darkened . . .”<sup>12</sup> Another report confirms this type of storm:

With the storm there was such a strong wind that straw was torn from the thatched roofs, and grain was blown from the fields . . . there has been so little rain, so the earth is soft . . . it was sad to see how the wind lifted the soil and carried it into the air. The sun was hidden and tried hard, yet did not manage to shine through the dust clouds.<sup>13</sup>



Winters were often relatively mild. Both Halbstadt and Ohrloff averaged six months of frost-free nights, from April to September. Halbstadt reported the average maximum temperature in January, 1850 to be  $+4^{\circ}\text{R}$ , though the minimum dipped down to  $-22^{\circ}\text{R}$ .<sup>14</sup> But there were also occasional cold snaps in winter:

For 32 years there has been no cold spell as there now has been in the Molotschna during this winter. In several places the thermometer last week went down to 28 or 29 degrees (R). Also the frost is of long duration. In previous years when the temperature fell to  $20^{\circ}\text{R}$ , it was usually for one day. . . .<sup>15</sup>

With that same cold spell someone from Tiegerweide complained that their deep well was frozen up for three weeks, something they could not remember happening during the 61 years they had lived there!<sup>16</sup> Winter storms might bring snow, occasionally drifting as high as the roofs. While this may have inconvenienced farm operations, it certainly brought excitement into the lives of the children. More often, however, there was intermittent frost and melting snow for most of the cold season.

Overall yearly precipitation was low, averaging 30-35 cm (12-14 inches),<sup>17</sup> most of this coming in May, June and July. Unfortunately, the rain often came in the form of violent rainstorms, sometimes accompanied by hail. A 1901 report from Tiegerweide mentions that it was hot and dry, except for thunderstorms with hail in early May. This was followed by great downpours in the last half of June; much grain on the steppe was flooded away; vegetables in the gardens on a number of occasions were under four feet of water.<sup>18</sup> Another description of the same period tells of a terrible storm on June 23, 1901, in which a severe weather system with rain and hail wrought great destruction in Muntau, Halbstadt, Petershagen and Ladekopp. Standing grain was flattened by hail, fruit was destroyed, much foliage knocked off and gardens were damaged. Even some old majestic trees were twisted off or uprooted. Hailstones were as large as walnuts and were "piled up as high as the windows." Many laden and empty wagons were overturned, and buildings, particularly barns and sheds were damaged. In the forests and gardens there were many dead crows, songbirds and doves. Though there was no loss of human life, some people had black eyes and swollen ears. The storm was likely quite widespread, since other villages in the Molotschna also reported severe damage.<sup>19</sup>

It was unfortunate that the summer rains were so often heavy

showers. Since there were few wooded areas in the region, the water tended to run off or evaporate before it could thoroughly saturate the ground. Despite excellent soils and sometimes adequate total rainfalls, there were frequent crop failures due to drought; in later years Johann Cornies tried to rectify this situation by a heavy emphasis on afforestation.

Other natural or geographical conditions in the area caused additional physical disasters. The Molotschna region was subject to earthquakes, though reports of their occurrence are few, and even then it seems that they were only minor. On January 11, 1838 one such quake was described:

People became dizzy, wall clocks stopped, cattle in the barns became restless and chickens fell from their roosts. Aside from a few cracks, buildings sustained little damage. After the earthquake the water in the wells was somewhat higher.<sup>20</sup>

Despite this litany of unmitigated disasters, one should not be left with the impression that conditions in the Molotschna were always unpleasant. Winters were not nearly always severe, most often consisting of intermittent rain and frost.<sup>21</sup> Spring in particular was often quite pleasant:

It is May, the best month of the year, the pearl of spring . . . everything is green. . . . The fruit trees are in the last stages of their flowering, only the apple trees are still in their full blossoming glory. Aside from the acacia and mulberry, which are just starting, the trees are in full summer dress, and in their branches one hears singing and music. Nightingales . . . finches . . . cuckoos . . . fill the blossoming gardens and green forests. . . . The crops are growing well. . . .<sup>22</sup>

## The Fauna

The Mennonites shared the broad steppes of New Russia with various other living creatures. There were small reptiles and mammals in the area, though a few larger animals are also mentioned.

Frogs and toads of various sizes inhabited the region. Mice and rats were especially common. Mice in particular were considered to be a pest. "Since October, both in the houses and on the fields there have been an unusual number of mice, somewhat later rats also appeared. Despite all the trapping and killing there has been considerable trouble and damage."<sup>23</sup> Rats were chased, poisoned and shot. Ground squirrels were common in the early years,

destroying the roots of crops, though a persistent campaign nearly exterminated them in the region. Rabbits were also a pest:

In the mild winters of the last few years together with the pleasant early springs, the rabbits greatly increased in numbers. Then came the long winter of 1853-4, together with much snow . . . so these animals, driven by hunger, invaded the tree plantations . . . gnawing the trees up to the depth of the wood. . . .<sup>24</sup>

Foxes were hunted by the early settlers, but even into the twentieth century they were still running off with their favourite meals of fresh wholesome chicken. Tobias Sperling, one of the original Hierschau settlers, shot foxes and rabbits, but also bagged a wolf near the town, much to the delight of the boys of the village.<sup>25</sup> Though they were hunted almost to extinction, a later resident was not as amused when wolves were seen, "then the whole village was on the alert."<sup>26</sup> Hedgehogs and moles were also co-inhabitants of the region.

It is difficult to be certain which birds were originally common in the area, but later settlers describe a rich variety. Some were spring migrants, singing their way into the hearts of the people, others were pests and objects of nest egg hunts. There were nightingales (*Nachtigal*), blackbirds (*Kirchpiwoler*, *Amseln*), finches (*Finken*), starlings (*Stare*), cuckoos (*Kuckuk*), gold finches (*Stieglitz*), hoopoes (*Wiedehopf*), titmouse (*Meisen*) and turtledoves (*Tauben*). The arrival of the birds in spring so delighted the communities that it was even reported in the newspapers.<sup>27</sup> Owls were present, probably feasting on the large numbers of mice, and also pheasants. Storks were common in the region, though not every village could boast of a nest (Hierschau had none). And then there were the ever present crows. Undoubtedly a pest, they probably did contribute somewhat to the welfare of the colony by devouring carrion.

The Molotschna not only attracted people and birds, but also came to the attention of insect life. Grasshoppers or locusts were a periodic plague, causing damage to crops. Attempts to control these invasions brought out the ingenuity in people: "Fire, harrows, machines for squashing them and collecting them in sacks have been tried. The sacks are then squashed and buried. People are very afraid, but this fear drives them to try the most unusual methods. . . ."<sup>28</sup> On a number of occasions it was noted that beetles accompanied the grasshoppers on their mission of destruction, though the specific type is not described.<sup>29</sup> Spiders were also pre-

sent in the area, and at least one variety was poisonous. It was reported that "here and there people have been bitten by the spider, so also my brother J. Neumann. He had to endure much pain, but now is fairly healthy again."<sup>30</sup>

## Surrounding People

While at the time the Mennonites settled into the area, the Molotschna seemed to be wide open, largely unoccupied steppe, there was a long colourful history of human habitation. Scythians had occupied the region before the time of Christ, and left burial mounds, some of which were within the Molotschna itself. Johann Cornies was interested in archeology and later excavated a mound. Cossacks roamed in the area for centuries, sometimes fighting against, sometimes subject to the Russian empire to the north. In later times the area was occupied by the Turks, and it was shortly after the Turks were expelled that the Mennonites were first allowed to settle in South Russia.

Though largely ignored by Mennonite historians, there were two villages in the Molotschna region. Tokmak (Gross Tokmak), apparently settled largely by Russians, probably pre-dated the Mennonite migration to the area. Situated on the north-west corner of the Molotschna Colony, near Halbstadt, its territory indented the Mennonite land holdings between Ladekopp and Fuerstenau. Gross Tokmak became a substantial town, and in later years was the first stop for shopping by the Mennonites for items not obtainable in their local stores. Chernigowka (Tschernigowka) was another Russian village about 10 kilometers east of the Molotschna, situated on the Tokmak River. It also grew and in later years became a shopping centre frequently visited by the Mennonites.

The open steppes south of the Molotschna were largely the territory of a nomadic people, the Nogais. Named after one of the commanders of the Golden Horde of the Mongolians of the thirteenth century, they were likely descendants of various Turkish and Mongolian tribes.<sup>31</sup> The Nogai considered the Mennonites to be undesirable occupants of the land and demonstrated their displeasure by stealing from, and on occasion murdering some of the settlers.<sup>32</sup> Later these tribes became less aggressive and even started farming, one of the signs of ultimate virtue, at least in the eyes of the neighbouring Mennonites.

Molokans also occupied part of the land south of the Molotschna. They were described by the Mennonites as honest and upright. Originally founded by Semen Uklein, formerly a member of the Dukhobors, they were a religious community described as a

“peasant anticlerical movement, rejecting the traditional Russian Orthodox Church, believing strongly in prayer and Bible study.”<sup>33</sup> A map drawn in 1806 shows the west bank of the Molochnaya River, opposite the southern part of the Mennonite territory, to be occupied by another group of people, the Dukhobors.

Gypsies wandered through the region before the Russian annexation, and continued to visit the area periodically. They included the Mennonite colonies on their itinerary, doing odd jobs, buying and selling, hunting and eating hedgehogs.<sup>34</sup>

Much the same time as the Mennonite arrival, other German immigrants settled on the west bank of the Molochnaya River. These were both Lutheran and Catholic, from Baden, Wuerttemberg, Hesse, Bavaria and various other regions of Germany. They established a series of villages along the Molochnaya River, Prischib being right across the river from Halbstadt. The Mennonites referred to these neighbours as “*Die Kolonisten*” (The Colonists).

### Early Settlement

As previously mentioned, 193 families left Prussia in 1803, stopping in the Chortitza Colony over winter. A further 162 families arrived from Prussia in the spring of 1804.<sup>35</sup> The original Chortitza settlers had to a considerable extent been landless people or poor artisans; these later migrants often had means of their own and many were skilled farmers. Eighty-nine families had 10,000-20,000 gold ducats, since they had been able to sell their farms in Prussia. They came in large canvas wagons, pulled by four to six horses; some brought nice furniture, chests, closets, tables and bedspreads. Others, particularly in later years, were not so well off, with some people actually pulling their own carts the entire way. The total journey usually took five to seven weeks.<sup>36</sup> They had, in some instances, already organized before they arrived at their new homes; Klaas Wiens was chosen *Oberschulze* (District Chairman) prior to the actual settling. In 1805 another 22 families arrived, followed by 15 in 1806. By 1810 well over 400 families had settled in the Molotschna Colony.<sup>37</sup>

The first pioneers in 1804 founded a line of nine villages from Halbstadt to Altonau along the eastern bank of the Molochnaya River. In 1805 another eight villages were laid out east of the original group, along the tributaries which flowed into the Molochnaya. In 1806 Fuerstenau was added to the northern group to complete the first burst of settlement at a total of 18 villages.

The villages were laid out accordingly to the principles of Ger-

man order and regularity. They were invariably established near rivers, presumably because of the necessary water supply in the dry climate. Ownership of the land was vested in the village commune, and was assigned to each village roughly in the shape of a rectangle, the village itself generally located in the centre. Each of the first villages consisted of 20 establishments, with a plot of 1½ dessiatines, 40 fathoms wide (1 fathom is roughly 2.13 meters or 7 feet) along the village street, as well as additional land for home use immediately behind this area. Houses were placed 14 fathoms from the street, leaving room for a small front garden. The first dwellings were sod huts, but soon regular houses were built, and it was not long before brick was used where suitable clay and sand were available.<sup>38</sup> Later villages had somewhat larger farm sites, and also 25-30 households. A travelling salesman visited the area in 1806 and drew the first known map of the Molotschna.<sup>39</sup>

Rueckenau was established in 1811, but after that migration from Prussia slowed down to a trickle because of the somewhat unsettled conditions. Bloody wars and great battles occupied the attention of most major European powers for a number of years, and Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812, crossing the path any migrants would have taken. Although Napoleon's Grand Army eventually did occupy Moscow, even it found travel conditions in Russia to be quite hazardous.

Once circumstances were more stable in eastern Europe, further emigration from Prussia continued. In 1819 a total of 75 families reached the Molotschna, founding Margenau, Lichtfelde and Neukirch; in 1820 another 179 families arrived, establishing another eight villages.

In 1819 the Russian government prohibited further immigration, but declared that this did not apply to Mennonites because of their industrious nature and the excellent state of farming among all the Mennonites already in Russia. The Committee of Ministers decided to admit 200 Mennonite families annually until all the Molotschna land was occupied. They even asked the Molotschna Mennonites to inform their compatriots in Prussia that they were still very welcome.<sup>40</sup> Statistics are not precise, but perhaps another 200 families settled in the Molotschna between 1821 and 1833. In that year the government decided to admit no more foreign colonists, although again occasional exceptions were made. In 1834 forty families led by Wilhelm Lange arrived from Brandenburg, subsequently founding Gnadenfeld. This became one of the most active religious centres in the area. In 1836 another group under the leadership of Kornelius Wedel established Waldheim.<sup>41</sup> No fur-

ther significant migrations from abroad to the Molotschna occurred after 1840, although some authors record a trickle for some years thereafter. Ehrt calculated that a total of 968 families had by that time left their homes in Prussia to establish themselves in the Molotschna area. There were 45 villages, with a population of 11,381. The twelve villages founded after this time were established by the descendants of the original immigrants.<sup>42</sup>

TABLE I  
MENNONITE EMIGRATION TO THE  
MOLOTSCHNA

YEAR	NUMBER OF FAMILIES	NUMBER OF PERSONS
1803	193	1020
1804	162	953
1805	22	
1806	15	
1808-9	99	
1819	75	} 2000-3000
1820	179	
1821-33	About 200	
1834	40	
1836	68	
1837-54	No significant migration according to most authors, though Urry records 221 families during this period.	

Ehrt calculated that by 1840 a total of 968 families had emigrated to Russia.

Sources: Ehrt, Giesinger, Isaac, Quiring, Rempel, Urry.

Mennonites, while having coalesced as an ethnic group in the Vistula Delta, were still basically a religious group. As such they took their religious and ethical principles with them into the new settlement, but they also brought their differences. The first groups to arrive, founding the first 19 villages from 1804 to 1811 were all Flemish Mennonites. More Flemish families arrived from 1818 onward, but in 1819-20 more than 100 families of Frisians arrived under the leadership of Franz Goerz. They founded seven

TABLE II  
VILLAGES FOUNDED BY MENNONITES  
IN THE MOLOTSCHNA

YEAR	VILLAGE	RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION
1804	Halbstadt	Flemish
	Muntau	Flemish
	Schoenau	Flemish
	Fischau	Flemish
	Lindenau	Flemish
	Lichtenau	Flemish
	Blumstein	Flemish
	Muensterberg	Flemish
	Altonau	Flemish
1805	Tiegenhagen	Flemish
	Petershagen	Flemish
	Ladekopp	Flemish
	Schoensee	Flemish
	Rosenort	Flemish
	Blumenort	Flemish
	Tiege	Flemish
	Ohrloff	Flemish
1806	Fuerstenau	Flemish
1811	Rueckenau	Flemish
1819	Margenau	Flemish
	Lichtfelde	Flemish
	Neukirch	Flemish
1820	Franztal	Flemish
	Pastwa	Frisian
	Grossweide	Frisian
	Mariental	Frisian
	Rudnerweide	Frisian
	Pordenau	Frisian
	Schardau	Frisian
	Alexandertal	Frisian
1821	Alexanderwohl	Groningen
		Old Flemish
	Fuerstenwerder	Flemish
1822	Gnadenheim	Flemish
	Tiegerweide	Flemish



1823	Liebenau	Frisian
	Elisabeththal	Flemish
1824	Prangenu	Flemish
	Friedensdorf	Flemish
	Wernersdorf	Flemish
1828	Sparrau	Flemish
1832	Konteniusfeld	—
1835	Gnadenfeld	Old Flemish
1836	Waldheim	Old Flemish
1839	Landskrone	—
1848	Hierschau	—
1851	Nikolaidorf	—
1852	Paulsheim	—
1854	Kleefeld	—
1857	Alexanderkrone	—
	Friedensruh	—
	Steinfeld	—
	Mariawohl	—
1862	Gnadental	—
1863	Klippenfeld	—
	Hamberg	—

Konteniusfeld in 1832, and all villages established from 1839 onward were largely settled by colonists from within the Molotschna itself.

Sources: Giesinger, Isaac, Quiring, Urry.

villages in 1820, centered around Rudnerweide, on the eastern end of the Molotschna, well away from their more numerous Flemish brothers. But even the Flemish came with a variety of stripes. Alexanderwohl was established in 1821 by a group of Groningen Old Flemish under Peter Wedel. They were met by Czar Alexander on the journey, and named their village in his honour. The larger groups that established Gnadenfeld and Waldheim were also of the Old Flemish, originally the most conservative branch. In the decades just preceding their migration, however, they had experienced renewal; this became evident in their active participation in religious life when they arrived in the Molotschna. Initially the differences between the Flemish and Frisians were strictly maintained, and even social life ran separate courses. There was, for example, as a rule no intermarriage between the two groups.

With time the differences became mainly outward, and eventually even the labels of Flemish and Frisian were dropped. However, a few vestiges of variance remained almost into the twentieth century.

The religious situation early in the colony life was further complicated by the establishment of the *Kleine Gemeinde* (Small Church). Begun by Klaas Reimer in 1812, this group separated mainly from the Flemish churches. Reimer himself lived in Petershagen, and most of the *Kleine Gemeinde* activity centered in his home village and in Muensterberg.<sup>43</sup> After separation the remaining larger Flemish congregation was known as the *Grosse Gemeinde* (Large Church). The official title was the Ohrloff-Petershagen *Gemeinde*, named after the sites of its two church buildings. This large congregation in time divided into a number of subgroups. One such division occurred in 1824, when a significant portion of the Ohrloff membership separated, ordaining Jakob Warkentin as elder. Since they were denied use of the existing church building, a new one was erected in Lichtenau. This Lichtenauer *Grosse Gemeinde* eventually divided into three groups, Lichtenau-Petershagen, Margenau-Landskrone and Pordenau.<sup>44</sup>

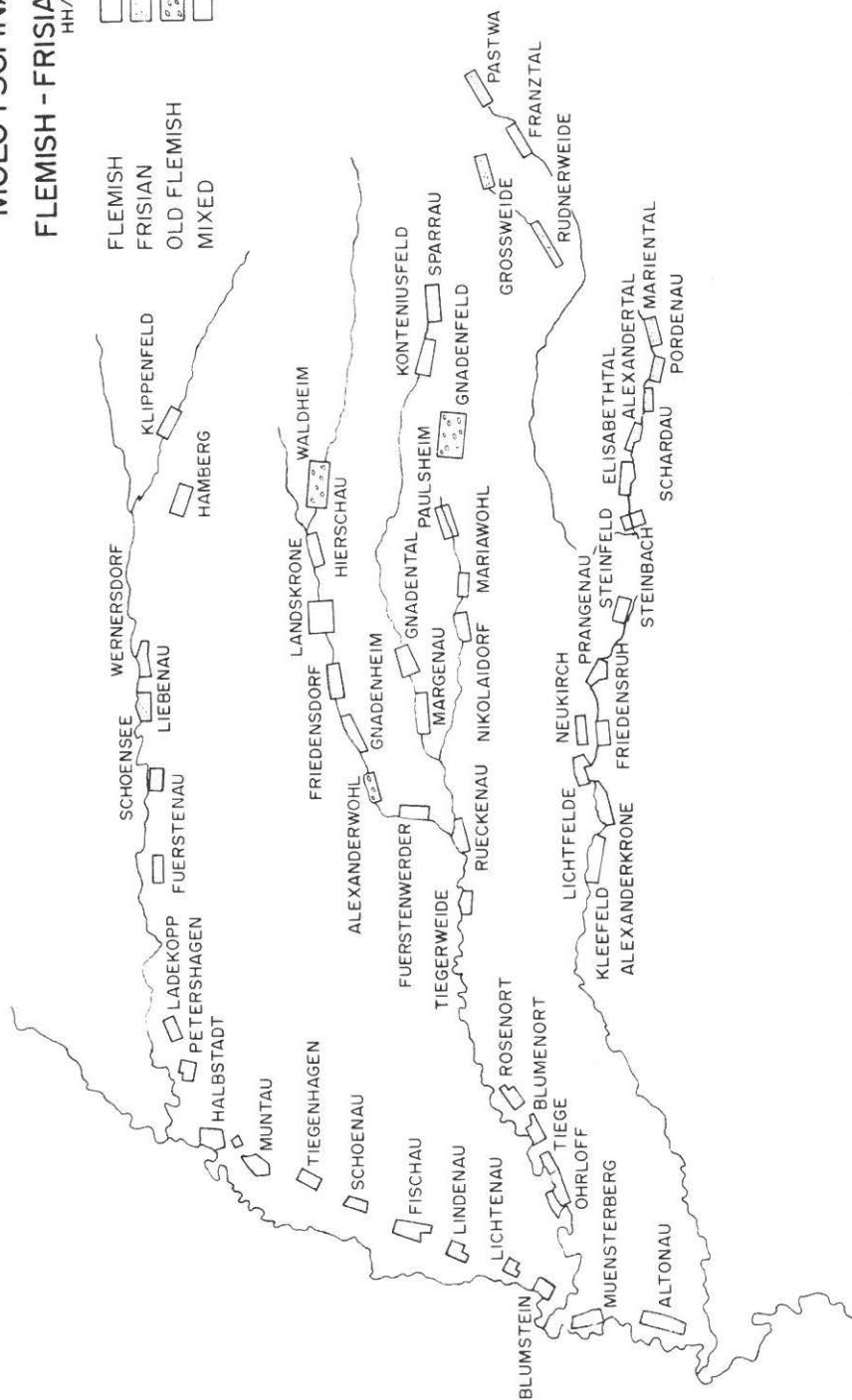
Many of the villages later established in the Molotschna, starting with Konteniusfeld in 1832, were settled by people from various areas of Prussia, some from the Chortitza and, of course, most from within the Molotschna. Since the main criterion for settlement appeared to be the need for land and not the religious affiliation of the settlers, these villages represented a religious mixture.

## Objectives

The Mennonites appear to have achieved most of their objectives in the emigration from Prussia to Russia. They were able to obtain generally acceptable terms, allowing them to settle in isolated communities which were virtually autonomous. They "took with them a distinctive view of the world, of their own society and of the type of person who should live in the new settlements."<sup>45</sup> This was to be a community of faith, based on Christian principles. Although there were certainly blurred spots in the vision, there was an attempt to put these ideals into practice.

The Russian government also had its purpose in allowing the new settlements. It had a vision of the role of Mennonites as models for the surrounding peoples in agriculture and industry.<sup>46</sup> In some respects these were similar visions, but in other ways they could never mesh. How could a humble Christian set himself up as a

# VILLAGES OF THE MOLOTSCHNA FLEMISH - FRISIAN HH/DH



proud model for the surrounding community? But some people felt that by synchronizing the gears a little both ideals could be achieved.

The concept of acting out the Christian life by being a model to others appeared to be the driving force in the life and work of one man in particular, Johann Cornies. He defined the ideal, often in concrete terms, then refined the concept until it was very difficult to differentiate between the Kingdom of God and the Mennonite *Musterwirtschaft* (model farm). When these two factors came into conflict, it appeared to some that the Kingdom of God had to give way to the *Musterwirtschaft*.

### Johann Cornies

Johann Cornies was born June 20, 1789 in Boerwalde, near Danzig in West Prussia.<sup>47</sup> The Cornies family emigrated to Russia in 1804, and after spending two years in the Chortitza Colony, settled in the newly established village of Ohrloff in the Molotschna. Originally a sailor, the senior Cornies now took up herbal medicine, and was soon treating patients from far and wide. The family, which had required government assistance to emigrate, now became quite affluent. Meanwhile Johann himself worked a year as a labourer for a miller, then purchased a Russian cart and began selling Molotschna agricultural products in the cities of the Crimea.<sup>48</sup> In 1811 he was married to Agnes Klassen, then bought a homestead in Ohrloff and began his own *Wirtschaft* (farm). He purchased a small flock of sheep, and in 1812 leased some of the unpopulated crown lands for his operations. Even at this time his plans and vision reached well beyond the confines of his own village, and certainly included many aspects of agricultural development well beyond the experience of his compatriots.

In 1816 Cornies established a stud farm, he himself visiting the Don region to select suitable horses. Soon thereafter he also started to improve the breed of cattle by the use of imported bulls. By 1817 government officials had obviously noted the prodigious activities and the wide interests of Johann Cornies; he was appointed lifelong chairman of the Society for the Effective Promotion of Afforestation, Horticulture, Silk-Industry and Vine-Culture. This position ushered Cornies into public life and assured his influence in the Mennonite colonies as well as beyond into the surrounding population. An agronomist, Gavel, writing about Cornies, felt that the well-spring of his career was an ardent desire to secure the future well-being of the Mennonite settlements by ensuring that they would flourish and gain for themselves a highly favourable

reputation.<sup>49</sup> This would be achieved by a "system of rational, market oriented agriculture, resting on experimentation and ceaseless calculation. It would secure for a growing population a greater enjoyment of life, morally, spiritually and materially, under the aegis of a gentle but strict leadership."<sup>50</sup> Also of basic importance to Cornies, according to Gavel, was a desire to demonstrate devotion to his monarch, the Czar, and the new Fatherland. This could best be done by ensuring the well being of the Mennonite colonies and their neighbours on the steppes of South Russia, thereby enriching the land and serving as ideal examples to follow. While the expression of devotion to royalty was likely motivated by pragmatic politics, there is ample evidence that Cornies did often receive advice and direction from government agencies, but was also in a position to give advice and influence government policies. He obviously had the complete confidence of officials such as chairmen of the *Fuersorgekomitee* (committee supervising foreign colonists), and was often consulted on agricultural matters well beyond the confines of the Mennonite colonies.

In 1830 Cornies leased a large tract of government land along the Jushanlee River, and over the years developed this area into a model and experimental farm. Many of the innovations instituted by Cornies were first tried on his own land or on Jushanlee. Eventually a complex of agricultural and business buildings was erected, extensive gardens were planted as well as tree nurseries and a forest of 68,000 trees. Cornies later purchased a number of large estates near Melitopol, and also had his own brickyard and tile manufacturing operation.<sup>51</sup>

Also in 1830 the *Landwirtschaftliche Verein* (Agricultural Society) was introduced in the Molotschna. Johann Cornies was its *Vorsitzer* (chairman), appointed to that position for life by General Inzov, chairman of the *Fuersorgekomitee*. Initially the powers of the Society were limited to the giving of advice, and that within a well defined sphere. It was to encourage specific fields of agriculture, afforestation, silk production and the planting of vineyards. Partly because of its direct links with the authorities, partly because of the character of its chairman, the suggestions of the Society tended to become compulsory. Its terms of reference also widened considerably until there was very little in the lives of the Molotschna settlers which was not in some way regulated.

With vigour which knew almost no bounds, with knowledge gathered from reading, from a wide circle of contacts and from experimental trials, and with a vision which in many instances was uncannily accurate, Cornies proceeded to improve the cir-

cumstances in the Mennonite colonies. To institute change in a relatively conservative society seemed at times to require despotic means. Separation of civil and religious spheres was blurred; the traditional personal responsibility, community leadership and prohibition of the use of force between believers sometimes became casualties of expediency.<sup>52</sup>

Afforestation was a long-term project of Johann Cornies. He was convinced that the well-being of the agricultural communities on the bald steppes of South Russia could be improved, even the weather modified to some degree, by the massive planting of trees. As was his practice, Cornies first modelled this concept on his own farms, starting in 1831. Eventually sections were set aside in each village for forests; it became mandatory to plant hedges between the *Wirtschaften*; every farmer had to plant a certain number of fruit trees each year; alleys of trees were planted along the roads between the villages.<sup>53</sup> Meticulous records were kept to document the progress of the project. On January 1, 1844, for example, there were 2,710,434 trees in the Molotschna, of which 250,342 had been planted in 1843.<sup>54</sup>

Animal husbandry was also a continuing concern of Cornies; he worked on breeding Merino sheep for the production of wool, as well as improving the stock of horses and cattle. With the dry conditions of southern Russia the traditional Mennonite swampland methods of agriculture needed to be modified to adjust to the new conditions. Feeling that more land should be devoted to cereal crops, partly to take advantage of world market demands, Cornies experimented with and kept records of crop yields using various new innovations. By 1835, on the basis of proven increased yield, a four field system of farming was introduced, with rotation of crops leaving one part in summerfallow at all times.<sup>55</sup> The use of stable manure as fertilizer was also advocated. Building of artificial ponds was initiated, by constructing earth dams on the small rivers that ran through the area; this would assure a constant supply of water for flocks and herds and allow for irrigation of the low lying hayfields.

But Cornies' interests and influence did not long remain confined to agriculture. He encouraged many industries and crafts, and even established Neuhalbstadt as an industrial suburb of Halbstadt. Since the government was interested in the silk industry, Cornies promoted the planting of mulberry trees and hedges and the production of silk. In 1843 the Agricultural Society was given jurisdiction over the schools in the Molotschna, and Cornies approached this task with his usual vigour. Primary education became com-

pulsory. Attempts were made to improve instruction by upgrading teachers, standardizing the curriculum and by regular school inspections. Cornies published "General Guidelines for Instruction of and Dealing with School Children, for the Teachers of the Molotschna District" in which 87 specific suggestions were made to improve the quality of education.<sup>56</sup> New and more functional schools were built in many villages to help this process.

The influence of Cornies soon spread well beyond the borders of the Molotschna colony. Chortitza, while officially not under the jurisdiction of the Agricultural Society, nevertheless instituted many of the programs. Cornies was asked by the government to help in the settlement of the nomadic Nogais; he worked with the Hutterites as well as the Molokans and Dukhobors; he established an agricultural internship program for young Russians and helped them to develop model villages; he tried to improve the agricultural status of the surrounding Jewish settlements. His work was obviously recognized and appreciated by the government; Cornies received a number of royal family visits as well as gifts of land, but also continuing authority to allow him to enforce his plans.<sup>57</sup>

It was under the tutelage of Johann Cornies that the concept of *Musterwirte* (model farmers) came to be virtually a tenet of faith in the Mennonite settlements. The concept dated back to the establishment of the colonies and even prior to that time, but it was gradually refined and regulated until it came to constitute a large part of the philosophy of Mennonite life. Urry feels that "The way of life of the colonists and their institutions which had developed in the Russian environment were to provide not only examples of how improvements might be made, but also actual models for the implementation of such plans."<sup>58</sup> The Mennonites were actually held up by those in authority as models of progress, examples of achievement and industry. Many, though not all of the villages, took this challenge to heart and accepted the role. Witness to their faith could best be expressed in excellence — in the establishment of *Wirtschaften* that were neat and orderly to a fault, that complied with every regulation set down by the Agricultural Society, and that exemplified the most modern agricultural techniques and innovations.

During his years as chairman of the Agricultural Society, Cornies, by virtue of the fact that the Society controlled land allotment and development, planned the establishment of a number of villages in the Molotschna. Konteniusfeld, named after Samuel Kontenius, the tireless and devoted chairman of the *Fuerseorgekomitee* in Odessa for many years, was founded in 1832.

Fischau was also moved to a better site in that year. Gnadenfeld was established in 1835, Waldheim in 1836 and Landskrone in 1839. In 1843 Neuhalbstadt was begun, and that same year Cornies also planned Huttertal and a few years later Johannesruh for Hutterite settlers.

In 1848 Johann Cornies planned the establishment of a model village, Hierschau. He planned it, but was not able to carry out the plans. Late in February he became ill, eventually becoming bed ridden. He died March 13, 1848, of a severe throat infection. The funeral was held on March 16. According to reports, "people flocked together from far and wide to accompany the mortal remains of the departed benefactor to their final resting place . . . joined not only by Germans but by Nogais, Russians, Jewish colonists and Molokans. The burial ceremony was favoured by the most beautiful weather."<sup>59</sup>

Johann Cornies was predeceased by his wife, who died in March 30, 1847, and survived by two children, Johann and Agnes. A memorial was erected in the cemetery at Ohrloff in his honor, which, according to the wishes of the deceased, was a broken marble column.<sup>60</sup>



### III HIRSCHAU: AN EXAMPLE IS BORN

1848 was an interesting year. Revolutionary ideas were flowing from the pens of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, with publication of *The Communist Manifesto* early in the year.<sup>1</sup> That spring riots and a series of uprisings erupted in France, Italy, Austria and southern Germany. The Mennonites, while safely isolated on the wide steppes of South Russia, were not totally unaware of the trends sweeping through Europe, and wished to assure the Czar that they had no similar aspirations. In August, 1848, the Molotschna Mennonites presented Czar Nicholas I with 130 excellent horses as an expression of their allegiance to the crown.<sup>2</sup> A letter of thanks from Count Kisselew was received in return, reporting the gratitude of the Czar.<sup>3</sup> Little could the Mennonites know that this was not to be their last brush with the ideas of Marx and Engels!

Very little specific information regarding the founding of Hirschau is available. Presumably the actual need for another village, as well as details of planning were documented in the minutes of the Agricultural Society. Unfortunately these minutes were last seen in the Molotschna sometime during the Revolution. We do have considerable indirect evidence, however, so that a reasonably accurate picture can be drawn.

#### When?

As previously mentioned, Johann Cornies planned a number of villages in the Molotschna Colony, and according to reports had also planned the village of Hirschau. Unfortunately Cornies was not able to carry out his plans because of his untimely death on March 13, 1848, so they had to be completed by David A. Friesen, the newly appointed *Oberschulze* of the Molotschna.<sup>4</sup> Hirschau was thus established after March 13, 1848.

In January of 1848 all the villages of the Molotschna were asked to submit reports outlining their history and current status. Hirschau did not send in a report because it was not yet established in January. By the time the reports were sent in, however, it is mentioned by two of the neighbouring villages. Fuerstenwerder reporters mention the newly established village of Hirschau in the line of villages visible from the slight elevation of a burial mound near their settlement.<sup>5</sup> The Waldheim report describes its western neighbour to be the newly established village of Hirschau.<sup>6</sup> Neither of these reports are specifically dated, but those of other villages which are, were written in late April or very early May,

1848. Hierschau had therefore been established by late April or early May, 1848.

From these bits of evidence one must conclude that Hierschau was founded some time after March 13, but before the end of April, 1848. This is consistent with the planning of a number of other villages, in that they were started in early spring, to allow the settlers sufficient time to establish themselves before the cold blasts of the following winter.

### What's in a name?

The exact spelling of the name of the village established in 1848 is not unanimously agreed upon. Heinrich Braun, a resident of the village for 20 years, affirmed almost to his dying day that the true spelling was *Hirschau*.<sup>7</sup> The derivation of this spelling is said to be *Hirsch* (deer) and *Au* (meadow). The author has even received anonymous mail confirming this theory most emphatically. It must be admitted that this spelling occurs occasionally in maps, charts and letters, even from the early times.

Should Hirschau be the correct spelling, and the explanation of its derivation be the correct one, the reason for its application would be a mystery. There is no evidence that deer were ever seen in the Molotschna area, although animals such as foxes and wolves were certainly mentioned.

There is, however, considerable evidence to support the spelling *Hierschau*. It is derived from two words, *Hier* (here) and *schau* (look), or "look here", here is a model to follow. According to Heinrich J. Thiessen, born and raised in Hierschau not long after it was founded, Johann Cornies had actually given the village its name, and had strongly encouraged (*anbefohlen*) the original settlers to be worthy of this label.<sup>8</sup> It appears that Cornies was trying, in the planning of the village, to institute his scheme of establishing *Musterwirtschaften* in the form of a well laid out and regulated settlement. It was not the habit of Johann Cornies to be easily swayed by popular opinion, and while some village groups chose their own names, Landskrone, for example, was given its name: "The deceased chairman Johann Cornies informed us of the name without any particular explanation."<sup>9</sup> The name of Hierschau may simply have come to the residents as information from Cornies, although an explanation was obviously given, since its meaning was intimately related to the purpose and philosophy of the founding of this village.

David H. Epp of Chortitza, contributor to *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, also espoused this theory: "(It was) originally thought of as

a model village, therefore the name '*Hier schau*!'."<sup>10</sup> In later times when Russification became mandatory, the translators obviously had similar information, since Hierschau was translated as *Premarno*, in Russian simply meaning "example."<sup>11</sup>

While not scientific proof, it certainly was the impression of the boys in neighbouring villages that the name was Hierschau, and that it meant "look here." There is documented evidence that at least on one occasion rascals from Waldheim streaked along the Hierschau main street on their buggies, bare bottoms to the breeze, deriding the local boys by yelling "*Hier! Schau!*"<sup>12</sup>

With the greater weight of the evidence favouring the spelling *Hierschau*, and the significance of this name being directly related to the purpose of its founding, we will continue to use this designation. It is my supposition that it is legitimate to continue to describe Hierschau as a true example, and sometimes as a model, of Russian Mennonite life.

## The Neighbours

Waldheim was a village founded in 1836 by a group of Groningen Old Flemish Mennonites from Wolhynia. They settled in the north-east corner of the Molotschna, along the Begim-Tschokrak River, on land which had been leased by Johann Cornies and at the time had no particular occupants. The first year eight farmers settled, followed in 1838 by 12, then finally another 20 in 1840 for a total of 40 *Wirtschaften*. Kornelius Wedel was the *Schulze* (mayor) for the first ten years, followed in 1846 by Christian Schlabbach. Since the Waldheimers had established their own separate church, they also had their own *Aeltester* (elder), Peter Schmidt.<sup>13</sup>

Landskrone, founded several years later in 1839, was established 6.5 km west of Waldheim on land also leased by Johann Cornies, but sublet by Heinrich Janzen. The 26 original families settled in two east-west parallel streets, also along the Begim-Tschokrak River. These farmers had volunteered after an invitation had been given in the Molotschna, and were joined by another 11 in 1840 and three more in 1842. The village was originally laid out in two streets because the river valley was so small; the river presented additional problems with flooding in springtime, so in 1844 a ten fathom wide canal was constructed to control its flow. With good crops in 1846 and 1847 all debts had been paid off by the Landskrone farmers, and the *Wirtschaften* were by then all well equipped.<sup>14</sup>

When Johann Cornies planned the next village in the Molotschna, he chose the fertile land between Waldheim and

Landskrone in the north-east corner of the colony as the site. Whether these two villages had to redistribute their holdings, or whether there was sufficient unoccupied land between them is not certain. Land was an extremely important factor in Mennonite agricultural life, therefore one assumes that such negotiations would not have been taken lightly. On reviewing the configuration of the village land holdings, one gets the impression that Landskrone probably kept most of its own land. Its fields extend almost to the outskirts of Hierschau, and the village itself is fairly well centered in its territory. Waldheim, on the other hand, may have given up some land, since the Hierschau allotment reaches almost to the first *Wirtschaft* of Waldheim. To maintain the 65 dessiatines of land for each farmer, Waldheim's territory could then have been extended on the other side. The peculiarly shaped Hierschau territory likely consisted of any land left between and around the holdings of Landskrone and Waldheim, and probably some of the Waldheim land. In all, for the 30 households planned for Hierschau, 1993 dessiatines of land were designated, 66.4 for each farmer.<sup>15</sup>

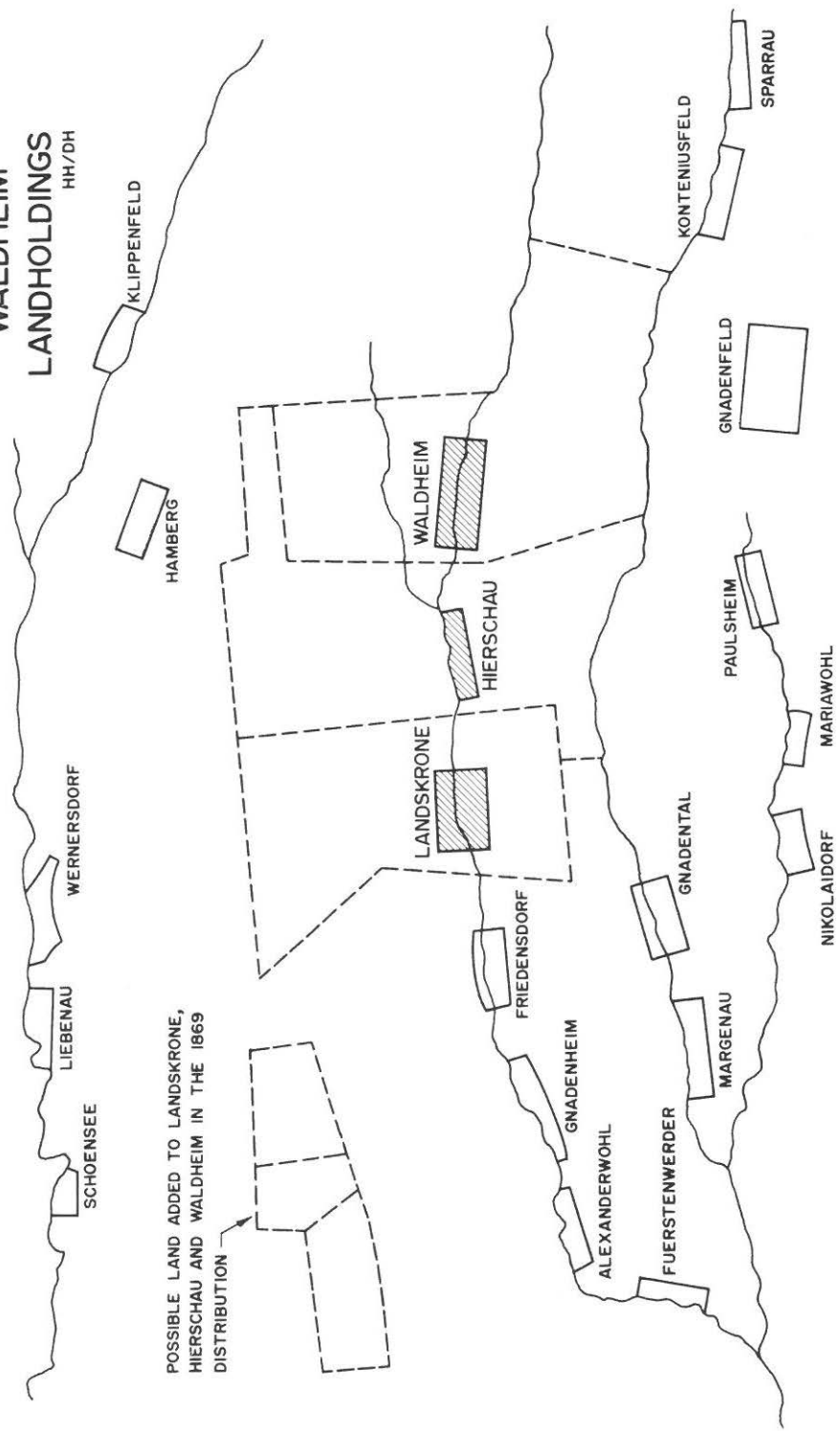
### The Founding

While specific information is not available on Hierschau, the procedure likely followed the one used when other villages were founded. Nine years after the establishment of Landskrone there must again have been a demand for more *Wirtschaften*. Laws of inheritance were such that farms could not be subdivided among the children,<sup>16</sup> so that only one child of the typically large Mennonite family could settle on the family farm. There was slight room for expansion within each village, with some need for artisans who could ply their trade and live in the *Kleinwirtschaften* (small farms). In many instances this led only to a subsistence type of life style, however, and certainly was not the desired goal for a young up-and-coming farmer with a growing family. As had been the case in Landskrone, it is likely that applications were accepted in the Molotschna for sites in the new village, in this instance to be a model village. If there were more applicants than sites, the correct number would have been chosen by lot. The site, and likely the village plans were already drawn up by Johann Cornies, so it remained to mark out the streets and yards by plowing a furrow along the borders. Specific sites within the village (commonly called *Feuerstellen*) were also assigned by lot.<sup>17</sup> Settlers of new villages who came from within Russia received no government subsidy. Since the Hierschau settlers came from within the Molotschna, it is

# LANDSKRONE, HIERSCHAU

AND

## WALDHEIM LANDHOLDINGS HH/DH



likely that no one had the benefit of such funds.

Being planned as a model village both for the surrounding Mennonites and the south Russian population, it is probable that the development of Hierschau was under the strict supervision of the Agricultural Society. It is reported to have been laid out in an orderly and symmetrical fashion; with the typical Mennonite sense of propriety it had straight streets with houses all placed in neat rows, yards all exactly the right size and shape.<sup>18</sup> Fifteen *Vollwirtschaften* (full farms) were planned for each side of the street, the yard being one dessiatine in size. An additional half dessiatine for each landowner was available in the original plan to allow for expansion by the establishment of *Halbwirtschaften* (half farms) or *Kleinwirtschaften* (originally a yard with no agricultural land allotment). Some villages set aside land for a church, though Hierschau did not, but a plot was left for the construction of a school near the centre of the village on the south side of the street. Practices mentioned as being in common use in 1852 were probably instituted in Hierschau.<sup>19</sup>

1. Farm yards 30 fathoms wide, 120 fathoms long, to include the house, barn, cattle sheds, threshing area, garden and general yard area.
2. *Kleinwirtschaften* each 20 fathoms wide by 60 fathoms long.
3. Land designated for forest plantation to be surrounded by a four fathom wide road.
4. Farm land to be arranged in a four field system. The farmer plants six dessiatines, summerfallows two.
5. Main village street to be ten fathoms wide, cross streets eight fathoms, other smaller streets four fathoms.

In addition, it seems that the Hierschau building code demanded that all houses be built of burned bricks, apparently most often red in colour, making for a very beautiful village. Original pioneers to the Molotschna had often started with earth hovels, while later settlers erected board huts until permanent housing could be built. Others seem to have built the barns first, moving into these structures until the houses were completed. It is possible that the Hierschau settlers, starting early in spring, could have completed the construction of most of their establishments before the onset of cold weather in the following winter. In any case they certainly used a lot of bricks! A report of Molotschna activities for 1848 states that 135 new houses and 140 business or farm buildings were built. The unusually large number of buildings was constructed "because 30 houses burned down, and 23 were built in the newly

founded village of Hierschau; that is why there was such a demand for bricks."<sup>20</sup> That same year 153 buildings were also covered with Dutch roof tiles; a number of the Hierschau builders may well have used them, though some of the houses definitely had straw thatch.

Not all villages were completely settled in the first year of their establishment,<sup>21</sup> so it is quite possible, if we use the evidence of the brick requisitions, that 23 farmers settled in 1848, the others possibly a year or two later. Planting of crops will have begun as soon as possible, probably at least to a limited extent already in 1848.

## The People

The early population of Hierschau is listed as 201, likely including men, women and children. With 30 households, this would mean the average family consisted of father, mother and four or five children. Who were these pioneers? As previously mentioned, the original settlers were from the Molotschna itself, likely responding to an invitation for those interested in the establishment of a new village.

We are fortunate that people from Hierschau have been proud of their heritage, and have been willing to describe their home village. On a number of occasions detailed descriptions were published in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* on the assumption that former Hierschau residents, by then living in America, were still vitally interested in their roots. A complete list of original founding settlers, as well as subsequent *Wirtschaft* owners, was sent in by Michael Duerksen in 1910.<sup>22</sup> Details of the lives of many original settlers come from the interesting letters of Heinrich J. Thiessen (brother-in-law of Michael Duerksen), prolific correspondent for the *Mennonitische Rundschau* at the turn of the century. Other facts can be gleaned from obituaries which have been printed in various periodicals. For a complete list of founding settlers, see Table III.

Most settlers appear to have been fairly young and healthy, with husbands aged a little over thirty, wives slightly younger. They were young enough to have plenty of energy, but old enough to have some farming and household experience. They must have enjoyed generally good health, since a surprising number lived to a ripe old age, well into their eighties. We have been able to trace two or three children in most families when they resettled in 1848, but to be consistent with the previously mentioned statistics there must have been four or five. Our records are undoubtedly incomplete.

TABLE III HIRSCHAU PIONEERS  
KNOWN ORIGINAL HIRSCHAU SETTLERS

Name	Birthdate	Village of Origin	Subsequent Events
Bernhard Bergen	?	?	?
Peter Boldt	Feb. 6, 1817	?	Died in Hierschau Aug. 23, 1902
David Buller	Sept. 24, 1813	Waldheim (possible)	Emigrated to U.S.A. in 1874 with 10 children. Alive in 1903
Fanz Dueck	?	?	?
Johann Duerksen	?	?	Probably father of Michael Duerksen
Peter Engbrecht	About 1809	Prangenaus	Moved to Crimea in 1861, then emigrated to U.S.A. in 1874
Aron Fast	?	?	Died in Hierschau well before 1901
Jakob Fast	?	?	?
Peter Friesen	?	?	?
Dietrich Goossen	?	?	Had at least 3 children. Peter about 1854, and Anna April 1, 1856 were born in Hierschau
Mr. Heidebrecht	?	?	?
Peter Hildebrand	?	?	Daughter Margaretha born June 11, 1848. Wife died soon thereafter
Tobias Kunkel	About 1818	?	Emigrated to U.S.A. in 1874 or 1875, alive in 1900
Heinrich Loewen	1816	?	Moved to Crimea in 1862, then emigrated to U.S.A. in 1874, alive in 1902
Jakob Loewen	1819	?	Moved to Crimea in 1862, then emigrated to U.S.A. in 1874
Johann Martens	?	?	?
Andreas Pankratz	?	?	?
Jakob Pankratz	About 1821	Friedensdorf (possible)	Moved to Crimea about 1860, then emigrated to U.S.A. in 1874
Julius Plett	Jan. 24, 1817	Pordenau	Died in Hierschau Jan. 21, 1892
Johann Regier	About 1816	Gnadenheim	Died in Hierschau in 1866
Abram Reimer	?	?	?
Johann Siemens	?	?	Was Schulze of Hierschau in 1858
Tobias Sperling	Feb. 12, 1820	Waldheim (possible)	Died in Hierschau Nov. 17, 1904



Jakob Stobbe	?	?	?
Franz Thiessen	About 1814	?	Died in Hierschau well before 1901
Jakob Thiessen	Feb. 17, 1816	?	Died, likely in Hierschau, Mar. 17, 1889
Tobias Unruh	Jan. 20, 1822	Waldheim	Moved to Crimea possibly 1860, then emigrated to U.S.A. in 1873
Jakob Wall	Jan. 30, 1810	?	Died in Hierschau Dec. 2, 1856
Isaak Wall	?	?	?
Jakob Wiebe	?	?	?

## OTHER EARLY HIERSCHAU SETTLERS

Name	Birthdate	Village of Origin	Subsequent Events
Johann Doerksen	?	?	A son was born in Hierschau in 1851
Mr. Harms	?	?	A son, Bernard S. Harms was born in Hierschau June 17, 1854
Peter Wall	?	?	Appears on censor list of 1858. Had a son Isaac
Johann Wiebe	?	?	Daughters were born in Hierschau in 1851 and 1852

It is possible to trace previous village of origin in seven families, confirming the supposition that Hierschau was settled by pioneers from other Molotschna villages. The largest number may well have come from Waldheim, the neighbouring village. Eight years after its settlement was completed, there must have been such expansion of families that further households had to be sought. A strong Waldheim contingent may account for the assertion of Quiring that Hierschau and Waldheim had the same peculiarities of Low German speech variants.<sup>23</sup> No settlers from Landskrone, the more recently established village on the other side of Hierschau, were found.

Specific sites within the village were determined by lot. While all the land in the Hierschau area was fertile, the north side of the street, that is the row of yards on the side towards the river, were on somewhat lower lying land. This made them more prone to flooding, but also produced more lush gardens. Quite possibly these *Wirtschaften*, Nos. 1 to 15, were preferred to those across the street.

The original Hierschau settlers likely had a pioneering spirit, but some of them also seem to have had *Wanderlust*. At least five families moved to the Crimea when it was opened for settlement in the early 1860s, then emigrated to the United States in the 1870s. Perhaps the spirit of adventure which gave people the courage to become pioneers lingered in the body as a life-long affliction!

## Early Development

Once Hierschau had been laid out, the initial buildings erected and the first fields cultivated, the inhabitants set about to complete the organization and structure of the village. It would soon take its place with the other 44 villages to produce the fabric of Mennonite life in the Molotschna.

Elementary school education was common in the Molotschna, so classes must have been held in the homes until a school building was built in 1852. Specific plans for new schools had been drawn up under the auspices of the Agricultural Society, so presumably the Hierschau structure followed these regulations. It was a brick building, teacherage on one end, with a large classroom which could be subdivided into two should the classes be large enough. By 1857 education was a booming business; Jakob Hiebert was the teacher, with 97 students.<sup>24</sup> It is hoped that he had some additional help, with the class possibly divided into two by then.

A number of other construction projects were probably carried out early on, since the overall welfare of the village depended on them. The Begim-Tschokrak River was only a small trickle of a stream, sometimes totally dried up in late summer, but in springtime flooding was common. As well, with sudden cloudbursts in the summertime, flash floods could occur which might inundate gardens and yards with virtually no warning.<sup>25</sup> The south bank of the river, that is the side which formed the north boundary of the village itself, was built up to form a dyke. This did not prevent all flooding of the village, but certainly alleviated the problem to a considerable degree.

The Molotschna rainfall was generally quite sparse. To obtain good crops of hay for the cattle it was necessary to irrigate or flood the low lying land, at least for some period during the year. Many villages, including Hierschau, constructed earth dams to divert some of the spring run-off onto the pasture areas. This also produced a little pond to provide drinking water for the cattle during the dry season of late summer.<sup>26</sup> The Hierschau dam was built in the west, at the Landskrone end of the village. Near this site a large



HIERSCHAU ORIGINAL SETTLERS  
HH/DH

well was also constructed to augment the supply of water for the cattle. It was three or four meters in diameter, not very deep, but shored up with bricks. A pulley and drum system powered by a horse was used to draw up water into a trough when the cattle needed to drink.<sup>27</sup>

A system of roads and paths was part of the original layout of the village. The main street down the centre of the village, running east and west, just south of, and parallel to the Begim-Tschokrak River, was straight and ten fathoms wide. In the middle of the settlement a cross street ran north and south, and was likely eight fathoms wide. At either end of the village were smaller cross streets, again running north and south. The cross street going north at the Landskrone end of the village was used as the *Uetjacht* (Low German: the path over which the cattle were taken from the village onto the common pasture). At least two bridges had to be constructed across the Begim-Tschokrak River, one for the *Uetjacht*, and one at the Waldheim end of Hierschau. These roads and bridges had to be maintained by the village; roads of course were not paved, but periodically had to be plowed and smoothed down, and the bridges were repaired as necessary.

In later years there was a small jail in Hierschau, built next to *Wirtschaft* No. 23, across the cross street from the school. It was a small, brick, red-tiled, one-room building — but hopefully not essential enough to be constructed early in the development of the village.

While young families might not consider a cemetery a priority because of the anticipated long life ahead of them, it is likely that this plot of land south of the village was designated very early, possibly with the original layout of the village.

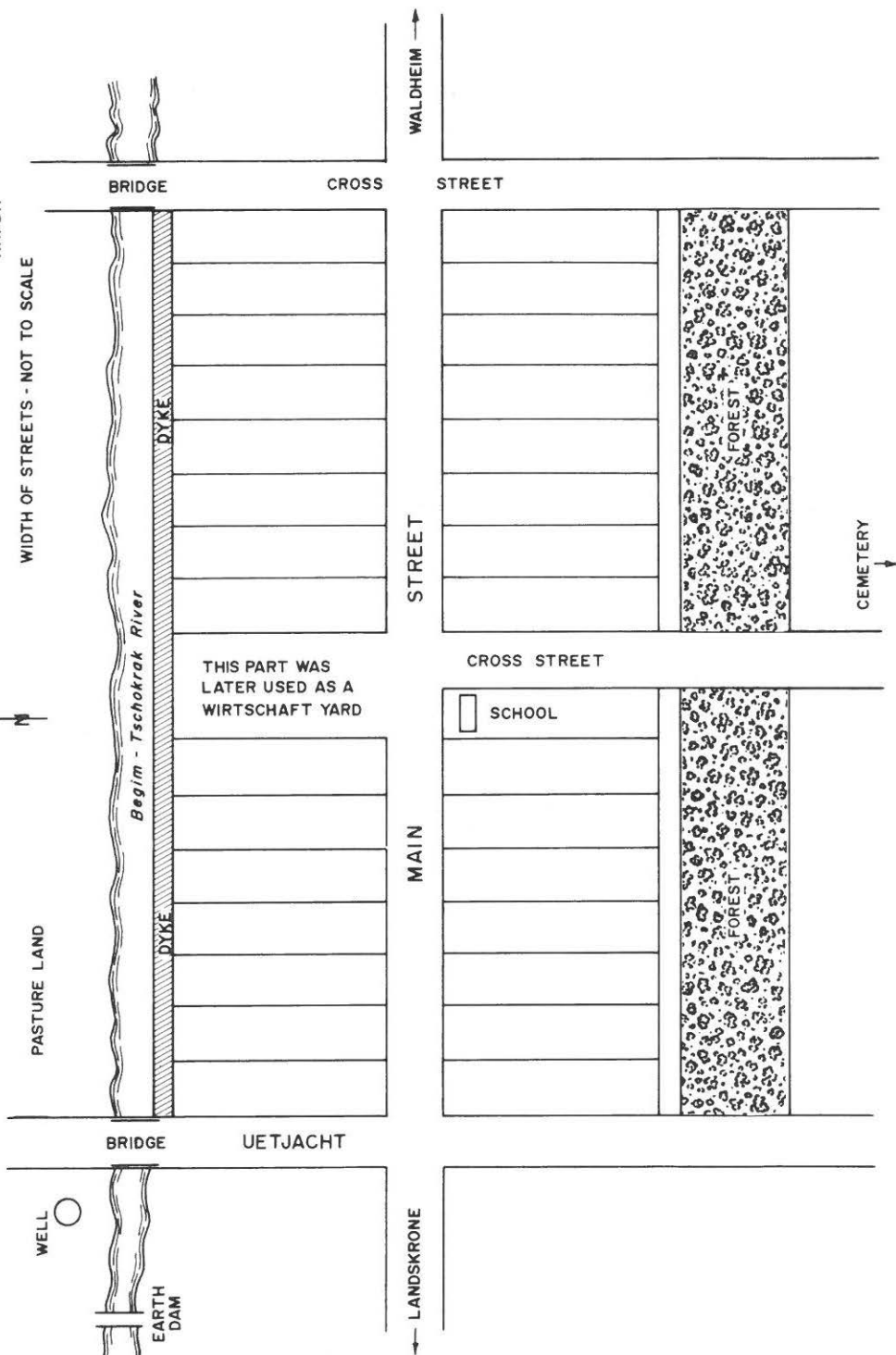
Hierschau was to be a model agricultural village, and after the initial construction of the farmsteads, the inhabitants likely took their task seriously. But seldom do pioneering situations follow the ideal. While no specific mention is made of Hierschau in these reports, it is probable that the first year or two of settlement was quite difficult because of the fluctuating conditions of continental weather. The village itself was begun late March or early April, 1848, therefore construction of the buildings will have been underway, but certainly not completed, when the Molotschna was struck by a violent storm on the night of June 10-11. Much damage was reported with a total of 37 buildings partially or totally destroyed. Obviously many thatched roofs were damaged, since the writer of the report concluded that Dutch roof tiles were much preferable to, and safer than thatched roofs.<sup>28</sup> It is quite probable that con-

# HIERSCHAU

## PUBLIC WORKS CONSTRUCTION

HH/DH

WIDTH OF STREETS - NOT TO SCALE



struction schedules of the Hierschau pioneers were considerably delayed by such a storm which was violent enough to destroy completed buildings.

Despite this one storm, most of the summer of 1848 was very dry. A severe drought afflicted the Molotschna Colony, with the extremely dry conditions in part responsible for a tremendous number of fires in South Russia.<sup>29</sup> An unusual number of buildings were erected in the colony that year because a total of 30 burned down.<sup>30</sup> The new pioneers must have been discouraged, since it is quite likely that yields for the first crop of 1848 were not very rewarding.

To add insult to injury, there was an unusually severe frost in December of 1848. This frost, together with the drought, caused the total number of trees in the colony to decline by 171,854 in 1849. One can only sympathize with the poor people who may not have completed construction of their houses by December, and therefore would have been more affected by the severe winter storms.

Like true pioneers, however, the Hierschauerers seem to have overcome the difficulties. There is no record of early departures of the discouraged from the village, but there were signs of rapid and aggressive agricultural development. The soil in the area was fertile,<sup>31</sup> and weather conditions permitting, produced good crops. Accurate records of crop yields were kept in the Molotschna for various grains for each village (see Table IV). In 1851 the average wheat yield in the area was a ninefold increase, the range being from  $3 \frac{4}{9}$  to  $13 \frac{2}{5}$ . Hierschau had a  $10 \frac{7}{8}$  fold yield, much the same as the neighbouring Landskrone and Waldheim.<sup>32</sup>

Raising sheep was already on the decline when Hierschau was founded,<sup>33</sup> and never was an important element in its development, but cattle, particularly for milk production, were vital. Jakob Loewen of Hierschau was one of the farmers selected in the Molotschna to measure milk production in April and May of 1851. His three cows produced an average of 12 quarts per day for the nine-day trial period, slightly above the average of  $11 \frac{4}{9}$  quarts.<sup>34</sup>

Hierschau was not immune to the official emphasis on tree planting, and as a matter of fact, was cited for its excellence. Efforts were first directed toward growing cereal crops and raising cattle, but then in 1851 the Hierschauerers turned their attention to trees. That year they planted a total of 703 orchard trees, exceeded only by Blumstein with 966 and Gnadenfeld with 846.<sup>35</sup> By January 1, 1852 a total of 810 fruit trees and 18 mulberry trees had been planted in orchards. Mulberry hedges were commonly used as

TABLE IV CROPS IN THE MOLOTSCHNA IN 1851

## WHEAT CROPS

Halbstadt	10 $\frac{1}{3}$ fold	Gnadenfeld	8 $\frac{5}{8}$ fold
Muntau	8 $\frac{3}{4}$	Landskrone	11
Altonau	9 $\frac{2}{3}$	Hierschau	10 $\frac{7}{8}$
Ohrloff	9 $\frac{4}{5}$	Waldheim	10 $\frac{1}{3}$
Tiege	11	Prangenu	10 $\frac{5}{9}$
Rueckenau	11 $\frac{1}{10}$	Grossweide	6 $\frac{1}{2}$

Range: 3  $\frac{4}{9}$  to 13  $\frac{2}{5}$  fold

Average in the district: 9 fold

## CROP AVERAGE IN THE DISTRICT

Rye	15 $\frac{1}{5}$ fold
Wheat	9
Oats	10 $\frac{1}{5}$
Barley	12
Potatoes	7 $\frac{7}{10}$

More information of other villages and crops available in the original report in the *Unterhaltungsblatt* report of May, 1852.

borders between the *Wirtschaften*. Hierschau in one year planted 3275 bushes. The village was looking to the future and at that time had 26,476 trees of various types in nurseries, in preparation for subsequent planting.<sup>36</sup> Planting forests apparently took considerable time. In 1855 it was reported that the forests of the 43 older villages in the Molotschna had been completed, occupying a total of 502 dessiatines. In the newest plantation of Landskrone, 13½ of the anticipated 20 dessiatine forest had recently been added, while it was expected that Hierschau would begin its forest in the autumn of 1855.<sup>37</sup> The forest was planted on a strip of land just south of the village, where each farmer had his own portion. Even the animals of the area seem to have thought it was a worthwhile and legitimate undertaking, for Tobias Sperling, the inveterate hunter, shot a wolf in the deep dark glens of the Hierschau forest.<sup>38</sup>

Despite what was likely a slow start because of severe weather conditions in 1848, it seems that Hierschau generally did very well, quite possibly better than expected. Excluding the sale of wool, which was largely controlled by the large estate owners, Hierschau

in 1851 had the highest per capita income of any village in the Molotschna. Total income was 8,591 rubles, 47 kopeks, with an average of 72 rubles 80 kopeks per working person, well above the 47 rubles for Lankskrone and the 45 rubles for Gnadenfeld.<sup>39</sup>

Much of the information we have about the Molotschna, and specifically about Hierschau during this time, appeared in *Unterhaltungsblatt*, a publication designed to promote the agricultural growth and development of the South Russian German colonies. While not proving that Hierschau was a hotbed of literary endeavor, one inhabitant, J. Wall, was listed as a subscriber in 1851.<sup>40</sup> It is quite probable that the paper was passed from one farmer to another, so it was not necessary for each one to receive it.

### On Life and Death

The original population of Hierschau, listed as 201 persons, likely included men, women and children. With 30 households, this would mean that at the time of the original settling, the average family consisted of parents with four or five children. By 1851 there were 118 people of wage earning age (*Arbeitsfaehige*) in Hierschau, and by extrapolation of the usual ratio common in the Molotschna, this would put the total population at about 242.<sup>41</sup> Some of this expansion would have been absorbed simply by an increase in the number of children living in each household. But each *Wirtschaft* also had a separate smaller plot of land available to establish a *Kleinwirtschaft*, so that at least one additional child could establish a household in Hierschau.

With predominantly younger families moving into Hierschau, it was not long until someone announced the arrival of an addition to the population. The first birth that has been found in the records was that of Margaretha Hildebrand, born June 11, 1848, about two months after the village was established. No details are known about her family except that her mother died while Margaretha was still a young child, and that she was raised under difficult circumstances. On April 24, 1868 she married Johann Baerg; eventually they had a total of eleven children. In 1875 Margaretha and her husband emigrated to the United States, settling in Hoffnungstal, Kansas. In 1877 she and her husband were converted and joined the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church in Gnadenau. Her husband died in 1918 and she died December 26, 1925 at the age of 77.<sup>42</sup>

The next recorded birth is that of Aganetha Kunkel, born August 8, 1848. She subsequently married Johann Aron Fast, who



was the next child born, November 2, also in 1848. The newly married couple then moved to Franztal, another village in the Molotschna.

But village life did not only consist of happy events — death inevitably followed. It is likely that the Hierschau pioneers were a fairly healthy lot, but in the mid-nineteenth century, life expectancy was not quite what it is today. Mrs. Hildebrand, mother of Margaretha, probably died at a relatively young age, and was likely buried in Hierschau within a few years of its founding. Jakob Wall, an early *Wirtschaft* owner, died December 2, 1856 at the age of 46, while Johann Regier, also an original settler, died and was buried in Hierschau in 1866 at the age of 50. Infant mortality was high, so undoubtedly a fair number of youngsters died and were buried without specific records being kept of these deaths.

### A Model

Had Johann Cornies seen the early development of his model village, Hierschau, he probably would have been pleased. It was built according to plan by young, able and aggressive pioneers, and despite initial difficulties soon took its rightful place, with the accompanying responsibilities, in the life of the Molotschna Mennonite Colony. There is no doubt that the villagers accepted, together with the name "Hierschau", the character and life style this name implied.

## TOBIAS SPERLING

An Early Pioneer  
(1820-1904)

Little is known of the Sperling family prior to the establishment of Hierschau. A Johann Sperling is listed as a farmer living in Grunau, Prussia in the lists of 1776,<sup>1</sup> but no people of such surname are included in the immigration lists of Stumpp or Unruh. Most original Hierschau settlers are said to have come from other Molotschna villages, so Tobias Sperling was born February 12, 1820, likely somewhere in the Molotschna. While it is not certain, he may have lived in Waldheim prior to his move to Hierschau.<sup>2</sup>

According to the usual practice, it must have been made known that a new village was to be established, and applications were accepted for places in this village. Tobias likely was a son who would not inherit his father's *Wirtschaft*; his application was accepted and he became one of the original settlers of Hierschau, obtaining *Wirtschaft* No. 16 by lot. He was 28 years of age at the time, so he was likely married, with several children.

Tobias Sperling had three children when his first wife died, probably at least ten years after the family settled in Hierschau. Tobias married again, choosing as wife a daughter of one of the other Hierschau pioneers, David Buller. The new Mrs. Sperling (first name not known) was about 20 years younger than Tobias; she bore him another 15 children. A list of the children was compiled by a friend, H.J. Thiessen, in 1903. At that time five children had already died.<sup>3</sup>

Elisabeth — married Gerhard Neufeld, then Johann Abrahams.

Maria — born about 1854-56. Married Jakob Plett.

Anna — born about 1859. Married Gerhard Warkentin.

Margaretha — born 1860-65. Married Kornelius Plett.

Aganetha — born January 25, 1866. Married David Plett,  
then Johann Harder.

Susanna — married Gerhard Penner.

Gertrude — married Heinrich Dueck, then Gerhard Warkentin.

Heinrich — married Katharina Neufeld

Peter — married Helena Koehn.

Sara — married Jakob Thiessen.

Tobias Sperling was primarily a farmer, occupying and working a *Vollwirtschaft* of 65 dessiatines, but he also loved to hunt. He continued this sport well into his old age, though by 1901, at the

age of 80, he had given it up. It was said that "Many a fox and rabbit has been done in, and had to allow its pelt to be carried to the market."<sup>4</sup> Even wolves were not safe, Tobias having shot one in the Hierschau forest; the village boys ran to the Sperling farm to admire the body of the dangerous predator, until then known to them only through stories and pictures.

The second Mrs. Sperling died on February 27, 1900, in her sixtieth year, just two days after the death of her daughter, Anna Warkentin. Both were buried on March 1, in the same grave.

Tobias seems to have been a fit old man, at the ripe old age of 80 having no trouble keeping up with men 30 to 40 years his junior. Probably having earlier moved from No. 16, he owned *Wirtschaft* No. 1 as late as 1901.<sup>5</sup> By May, 1904, he had passed it on to his youngest son Peter.

On November 17, 1904, Tobias Sperling suddenly became ill at 4 p.m. Possibly suffering from a stroke, he died at 9 p.m. that same day at the age of 84 years. Thus the last of the original farmer pioneers still living in Hierschau passed from the scene. The correspondent who reported his death used the opportunity to point out that "the Lord often speaks in our time through sudden deaths; we are living in serious times and fortunate are those who are ready . . ."<sup>6</sup> Heinrich J. Thiessen, who grew up in Hierschau, obviously a friend and long time admirer of Tobias Sperling, and who had mentioned him at every opportunity in previous reports to the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, did not report his death. He himself was likely very ill at the time, three months later also meeting his Maker.

As mentioned previously, the Tobias Sperling *Wirtschaft* No. 1 had passed to the hands of his youngest son, Peter, by May, 1904. One week after the death of his father Peter married Helena Koehn of Waldheim, on Sunday, November 28, 1904. Exact circumstances are not known, but it is quite possible that Peter was not as good a farmer as his father, for by 1910 his older brother Heinrich had taken over the *Wirtschaft* and Peter had moved one yard down the street to occupy a *Kleinwirtschaft* which likely had no land allotment.<sup>7</sup>



## IV THE MID-CENTURY COMMONWEALTH

By mid-nineteenth century the Molotschna Mennonite Colony had achieved many of its anticipated goals. Those who had emigrated to Russia to establish a separate society, a community of faith, had done so, though things may not have turned out quite as they had hoped. Those who resettled to improve their economic status had in many instances exceeded their wildest dreams. According to Klaus "... the Molotschna district became the centre of the business and intellectual activities of the Mennonites, the pride and joy of the colonial Commission."<sup>1</sup> The Mennonite colonies in South Russia, in religion and culture distinct, politically largely autonomous, have been thought of as a Commonwealth,<sup>2</sup> a country within a country, with the Molotschna as its showcase.<sup>3</sup>

To understand the ebb and flow of village life, even in the serene model village of Hierschau, it will be helpful to take a step back from the specific village, and in a broader context review some of the developments of the Mennonite Commonwealth, particularly as they occurred in the Molotschna Colony. It will not be possible to look at all aspects of community life, but a few areas will be highlighted, some reflecting a positive experience, others a much less exemplary life style.

### Political Structure

The basic unit of government, the main agency for regulation of political, social and economic life in the Mennonite community, was the *Schulzenbott* (village assembly).<sup>4</sup> The *Schulzenbott*\* consisted of one representative, usually the head, from each farm. The *Schulze* (mayor) and two *Beisitzer* (assistants) were elected by a majority vote from members of the assembly, most often for a two year term. Only landowners could vote and only they were eligible for these offices.<sup>5</sup> A *Dorfschreiber* (village clerk) was appointed as a hired official. In addition, every ten farmers elected a deputy (called collectively *Zehntmaenner*) to serve a month at a time. The *Dorfamt* (village administration) met at least once a week, the meeting being chaired by the *Schulze*; decisions then had to be ratified by the village assembly.

Duties of the *Schulze* and his assembly covered almost all aspects of village life. They were responsible for assuring peace and order, levying taxes and disbursing public funds, for proper

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\*In the commonly used Low German it was *Schultebott*, with the mayor being the *Schult*

building and maintenance of roads and bridges. They regulated agricultural development, including designation of rotation of crops, as well as times to plow, sow and reap. They monitored the maintenance of houses, barns, yards and fields of each farmer, and were responsible to care for the aged, sick and orphaned, and in general to work for the welfare of the village. They saw to it that moral standards were maintained, and that every villager went to church on Sundays and on holidays. The assembly also selected preachers, teachers, fire overseers, municipal herders and constables. With his two assistants the *Schulze* formed the court of first instance in civil cases and minor offences. The *Schulze* generally represented the village at the meetings of the district assembly.

Few of the early Hierschau village officials are known, but in 1858 Johann Siemens was *Schulze*, Jakob Thiessen the *Beisitzer*.<sup>6</sup> Quite possibly this administration continued for a number of years, but in 1874 the 29 year old Kornelius Regier was elected *Schulze*.<sup>7</sup>

The *Gebiet* or *Bezirk* (district) government was under the jurisdiction of the district assembly, which consisted of one or more representatives from each of the villages. The *Schulze* or one of the *Beisitzer* was always one of the delegates to this assembly. The *Gebietsamt* or *Bezirksamt* (district office) consisted of an *Oberschulze* (district chairman) elected by the assembly for three years, two *Beisitzer* elected for two years, and hired clerical staff, the most important being the *Gebietsschreiber* (district clerk). While the village administrative office was only a set of books, the district government, having full time clerical staff, was situated in Halbstadt and had an actual office.

In general, the function of the district government was an extension of the power of the local assemblies, applied to a larger area. The *Gebietsamt* was the second line of the judiciary, dealing with larger civil cases and some of the criminal cases. Being responsible for order in the district, it exercised police power in the area and could impose sentences on those who failed to carry out directives or government orders. It supervised the activities of the village *Schulze*, but itself was responsible to the district assembly. The *Oberschulze* represented the district at assemblies or meetings with government agencies.

The district assembly, through the *Oberschulze* and his assistants, in turn was responsible to the appropriate Russian government agency. When the Chortitza Colony was founded, the new settlements had been under the jurisdiction of provincial and local authorities. The resultant chaos led to an investigation by

Counsellor Kontenius, and in 1800 to a revision of the status, by the establishment of an agency dealing specifically with settlements in New Russia. Headquarters were in Novorossiisk (subsequently renamed Jekaterinoslaw), and provisions for the establishment of local regions of self-government were issued to this bureau. By 1818 the number of colonies in New Russia had increased to the extent that re-organization was necessary. In 1819 the "Guardians Committee of the Foreign Colonists in the Southern Region of Russia" (commonly called *Fuersorgekomitee*) was established. It was under the Ministry of the Interior, and was responsible for all existing colonies and the establishment of new ones. The committee seat was transferred a number of times in the first years, depending on the area of its greatest activities, but in 1828 it moved to Odessa, where it remained until it was dissolved in 1871.

Most Mennonite interactions with government officials, regardless of the specific sphere, were through the *Fuersorgekomitee*. Government laws and regulations were instituted under its jurisdiction and Mennonite requests or responses went through this channel. For many years the chairman of the *Fuersorgekomitee* was counsellor Samuel Kontenius, whose definite priority seemed to be the welfare of the Mennonite colonies. Generally speaking the function of the committee was quite satisfactory as it related to the Mennonite colonies. It must be said that where Mennonite self government failed, the committee was asked, or almost forced, to intervene in disputes which unquestionably should have been settled internally.

The village assembly, responsible to the district assembly, responsible to the *Fuersorgekomitee*, was a simple line of authority. Because of other complicating factors application of this simple line of authority, however, was not always that easy.

In a community established as an expression of its Christianity, the Church by definition must play a vital role. Where lines of jurisdiction are clearly drawn between the civil and ecclesiastical authority, most areas of contention will at least be minimized. But in a society where the mayor is responsible to see that all villagers are in church on Sunday morning, it is obvious that these lines are at best very indistinct. In many instances civil authority was used to impose church discipline, and church position was used to impose (or oppose) purely civil regulations.

Superimposed onto this structure was the *Landwirtschaftliche Verein* (Agricultural Society). It was established in the Molotschna in 1830, with Johann Cornies appointed chairman for life. Initially the power of the Society was limited to advice, and that within

well-defined areas of agriculture. Because of direct access to government agencies, also in part because of the forceful character of its chairman, advice of the Society gradually became regulation. Its sphere broadened from agriculture to include almost all facets of Molotschna life. An example of expanding influence was control of the schools, which came under the jurisdiction of the Society in 1843. Schools could hardly be considered to be an agricultural endeavor. It would be foolish to assume that interaction between the civil authorities, church and Agricultural Society would always be amicable under these circumstances. While not invariably so, plans of the Agricultural Society tended to be the ones, sometimes despite severe opposition, which set the tone and direction of Molotschna life. The agricultural programs introduced or encouraged by Johann Cornies were not unanimously endorsed, but eventually were universally applied and undoubtedly led to the unexcelled prosperity of the colony. The school system started as a thinly disguised employment agency for those not capable of farming, but under the direction of the Society developed into a well organized, very competent agency with standards of which many Molotschnaers became proud.

Johann Cornies was a skilled tactician, well able to use the powers at his disposal to achieve the desired ends. When Mennonite officials opposed his plans he could in some instances, because of his direct access to government agencies, simply override their authority. In other instances he would help manipulate circumstances to bring like minded candidates into positions of power. Abraham Toews of Tiege was the *Oberschulze* of the Molotschna during the latter part of Johann Cornies's life. Elected on September 2, 1842<sup>8</sup> with the encouragement of Cornies, they worked well together, so much so that they were called the "Ohrloff Power Block."<sup>9</sup> Their homes, Tiege and Ohrloff, were neighbouring villages in the south-west part of the Molotschna. Johann Cornies died in 1848, leaving many of his plans unfinished. Abraham Toews, as *Oberschulze*, could have continued with the same programs, but he also died that same year. Partly as a conservative backlash, David A. Friesen of Halbstadt was chosen as the next *Oberschulze*, and remained in that position for 17 years. In outlook he represented the large landowners; he resented changes, particularly if they were innovative, even to the extent of trying to reverse previous progress. He disliked the Ohrloff community as well as the newly appointed chairman of the Agricultural Society. Philip Wiebe, son-in-law of Johann Cornies, as the new Society chairman, tended to continue with the policies of his predecessor,





though he was not able to maintain the firm personal control Cornies had exerted. He completed the remaining portions of the school plans, such as making school attendance compulsory, and arranged for district and regional teacher conferences.<sup>10</sup> Wiebe became ill, so David Cornies, brother of Johann, continued the work for a brief time until he died in 1853 or 1854. Peter Schmidt, owner of an estate in Steinbach, then became the Society chairman.

In the 1850s and 1860s there was considerable turmoil in the Molotschna, centering mainly on the religious and economic spheres. The economic problems revolved around the question of land ownership. Perhaps these struggles brought to light organizational weaknesses, though maybe it was simply the sheer size and complexity of the Molotschna which led to its division into two sections. In the spring of 1870, under the auspices of the *Fuersorgekomitee* a second administrative unit was established. Overall reform of the administrative structures occurred in Russia the following year, with Imperial approval on May 31, the law being promulgated on June 4, 1871.

The Molotschna was divided into the Halbstadt *Wolost* (new name for *Bezirk*) with headquarters in Halbstadt, and the Gnadenfeld *Wolost*, headquarters logically in Gnadenfeld. Terms of reference for village and *Wolost* assemblies remained virtually the same, though minutes of meetings and bookkeeping had to be in Russian. Both villages and *Wolost* assemblies had representatives of the landless group.

The Halbstadt *Wolost* included the western section of the Molotschna, with 30 villages and slightly more than half the population. The larger portion of the industrial development was also in this *Wolost*. Kornelius Toews of Tiege had been the *Oberschulze* of the Molotschna from 1868 to 1870, and continued as *Oberschulze* of the Halbstadt *Wolost* until 1873.

The Gnadenfeld *Wolost* consisted of the remaining eastern section of the Molotschna, with 27 villages, including Landskrone, Hierschau and Waldheim. There was less industry in this area, though a number of factories were built in Waldheim. Wilhelm Ewert of Grossweide was the first *Oberschulze*, from 1870-71, followed by Franz Penner in 1871, then Peter Ewert of Rudnerweide.<sup>11</sup> Hierschangers appear to have played no significant role in the administration of the Molotschna, but after the division into *Wolosts*, they had more influence in Gnadenfeld. Jakob Duerksen of Hierschau even became *Oberschulze* in later years.<sup>12</sup>

## Economic Development

When the Mennonites first settled in the Molotschna, the area was quite isolated. They were virtually self-sustaining, producing most of what they needed, and tending not to emphasize exports. The large landowners, however, soon went well beyond these narrow confines, and by leasing or buying large tracts of land, developed a sheep and wool industry which depended on the foreign wool market. This allowed them to reap huge profits and develop a life style far different than that which could be maintained on the ordinary village *Wirtschaft*.

The founding of new towns and ports in South Russia, the selling of produce to local markets, and the improved opportunities to export to world markets, gradually changed the economic orientation of the Molotschna.<sup>13</sup> In the Chortitza goods and supplies could easily be sent on the Dniepr River to Kherson and then on to Odessa. There were no navigable rivers in the Molotschna area, so the produce had to be transported by wagon, often to the newly established port city of Berdiansk (established in 1831) or even as far as the Crimea. Traders came to the colonies to buy grain, wool, butter or cheese.<sup>14</sup> Long trains of wagons carrying wheat often made the 100 werst trek to Berdiansk after the harvest was completed.<sup>15</sup> Groups of Mennonite young men considered this to be an adventure, though at times they went through somewhat dangerous territory. They participated in the transport of produce to Berdiansk and even to the market cities in the Crimea, such as Taganrog and Simferopol.<sup>16</sup>

Johann Cornies became convinced that the long term welfare of the Mennonite colonies depended on a shift of emphasis from stock to cereal grain farming. In 1835 summer fallowing was introduced, and in 1838 Cornies ordered that of the 65 dessiatines, each farmer had to devote at least 25 dessiatines to cereal crops. This land was to be divided into four portions, three to be used for grain, one part for summer fallow.<sup>17</sup>

Detailed statistics of Molotschna agricultural production and income were kept, so trends can quite easily be ascertained. The shift from livestock and wool to cereal crops is most easily shown by the change in income from these sources:

1841	Livestock and wool	56,555 rubles
	Grain and other products	105,881 rubles
1852	Livestock and wool	44,519 rubles
	Grain and other products	286,593 rubles

Livestock and wool income dropped by 22% from 1841 to 1852, while grain and other income almost tripled.<sup>18</sup> A more detailed breakdown of farm income in the Molotschna for 1851 shows greatest returns were derived from wheat, other grains and garden produce, wool, trades and handicrafts<sup>19</sup> (see Table V). Average income was 136 rubles per family, about 34 rubles for every person of working age (14 to 60 years). It will be recalled that in 1851 the Hierschau income was almost 73 rubles per working person, more than twice the Molotschna average.

TABLE V  
MOLOTSCHNA FARM INCOME IN 1851

COMMODITY	AMOUNT	INCOME
Wheat (all types)	31,583 Tschetw.	134,276 R 44 K
Various Grains and Garden Produce	—	97,938 R 46 K
Wool	5,073 Pud	42,198 R 93 K
Trades and Handicrafts	—	36,638 R
Livestock — Horses	426	34,139 R 33 K
— Cattle	656	
— Sheep	7,677	
Silk	178 Pud	30,687 R 15 K
Butter and Cheese	—	23,181 R 82 K
Fruit and Nursery Trees	—	4,161 R
Total		402,221 R 13 K

Sources: A Klaus, *Unsere Kolonien* (Odessa: Odessaer Zeitung, 1887), p. 244

Molotschna Report, *UB*, May 1852 Beilage, pp. 7-8.

With increasing reliance on the general Russian economy and on world markets, there was more interest in features such as the weekly announcement of the Odessa grain prices as listed in *Unterhaltungsblatt*. Presumably this information was used to determine which grain should be sold, and when. In the 1870s and 1880s, with further expansion of grain markets and the resultant increased profitability, many Mennonite farmers partially abandoned summer fallowing, often having as little as one-seventh of the land in this category. There was heavy emphasis on wheat,

with up to two-thirds of the land planted to this crop. It is a strange quirk of humanity, certainly not confined to Molotschna Mennonite farmers, that short term gain can cause abandoning of the very factors which, in the long term, helped these benefits to occur in the first place.

While the mid-century was by and large a time for expansion and agricultural development, this did not always come easily. 1846 and 1847 were good years, Landskrone farmers, for example, being able to pay off their debts. But 1848, 1850 and 1853 were dry years with poor crops. Despite afforestation, summer fallowing and village dams, periodic droughts remained a problem, though likely these measures alleviated the situation to some degree. Disease among cattle was also a problem. In 1849 hoof and mouth disease broke out in six Molotschna villages, though no significant number cattle died. The "plague" was found in one village, where ten animals died.<sup>20</sup> Foot and mouth disease appeared again in 1855 and was controlled by isolating the involved cattle.<sup>21</sup> Grasshoppers and beetles were an added hazard to crops. The Mennonites devised all kinds of methods for killing the pests, including specially designed sack holders and grasshopper squashers.<sup>22</sup> The grasshopper squasher, designed by Johann Wedel of Waldheim, was a wooden apparatus five feet wide pulled by two horses.

Taking everything into consideration, 1855 seems to have been a discouraging year, though the hay crop added one cheery note.<sup>23</sup>

Orchards had very little fruit due to a frost during the nights of March 19-24.

Tobacco crop had a low yield because not enough labour was available to do the work.

Vegetables were largely destroyed by grasshoppers.

Potatoes were damaged by an early frost August 19-20.

Grain crop was greatly reduced due to a late drought, many beetles and grasshoppers.

Hay crop was good, and particularly nourishing because circumstances were just right.

Hoof and mouth disease broke out among the cattle.

Yet the development of the Molotschna continued. Many years had a bountiful harvest and the agricultural economy continued to expand gradually, both from the point of view of utilization of more land, and increasing efficiency of production.

The Mennonites in Prussia were predominantly farmers, but throughout the years had increasingly turned to other trades and professions. With emigration to Russia the orientation was again

more to the land, some of those with other professions receiving land and taking up farming. Others retained their skills, and particularly those in the building trades were very useful for the establishment of new settlements. With the large families and decreasing opportunities to own *Wirtschaften*, people in the Molotschna again increasingly turned to the various trades and professions. In 1854 there were 541 people in 23 different categories, with 96 blacksmiths, all the way to one mattress maker (see Table VI). While the specific prosperity of each undoubtedly depended on hard work and intelligent business management, it was reported that "all have plenty to do, except for the linen weavers, who do their craft on the side, and the baker, who is seldom used."<sup>24</sup>

TABLE VI  
TRADES AND PROFESSIONS IN THE  
MOLOTSCHNA IN 1854

Blacksmiths	96	Watchmakers	9
Linen Weavers	65	Machinists	8
Wheelwrights	61	Coopers	8
Cabinet makers	51	Locksmiths	4
Master carpenters	50	Bookbinders	2
Shoe makers	50	Tanners	2
Tailors	44	Rope makers	1
Glaziers	25	Bakers	1
Masons	22	Tin founders	1
Painters	14	Coppersmiths	1
Turners (machinists)	13	Mattress makers	1
Saddle makers	12		

Source: UB, July 1855, p. 56.

The building trades generally seemed to flourish in the Molotschna. With new villages springing up (the last one was founded in 1863), the replacement of older more primitive residences and barns by more substantial brick-walled, tile-roofed buildings, and continual reconstruction of burned-down buildings, they were probably busy most years. In 1854, despite a difficult economy, a total of 250 buildings were constructed. This included 127 residences, 82 barns, five school houses and four warehouses. With strong encouragement of the Agricultural Society the trend

was to brick, 133 of these structures using them.<sup>25</sup>

Industry was also developing in the Molotschna, relating mostly to the manufacture of agricultural machinery, milling, production of building materials and brewing. The manufacturing tended to be centred in the western part of the Molotschna, particularly in Halbstadt. It will be recalled that Johann Cornies even established Neuhalbstadt as an industrial suburb of Halbstadt to promote further development. Waldheim, immediate neighbour of Hierschau, was also the site of considerable industry.

The Molotschna *Wirtschaften* required a steady supply of farm implements; in 1855 they had a total of 2110 plows, 3579 harrows and 3795 wagons.<sup>26</sup> To supply such demands, a manufacturing industry developed which soon not only met local needs, but even exported its products. New innovations helped agriculture, but also the implement manufacturers. The "furrow plow" invented by Dirk-Dick of Chortitza earned him a gold medallion, which he received by royal decree on February 21, 1844.<sup>27</sup> In 1854 Molotschna factories produced a total of 658 wagons, 325 plows, 63 harrows and 28 grain-winning machines.<sup>28</sup> To process the agricultural products there were that same year 50 windmills, 47 treadmills, 18 grist mills as well as 49 oil presses. To produce building materials there were 35 brickyards, eight roof tile factories and two that produced stove tiles. There were seven vinegar distilleries, two beer breweries and one brandy distillery.

After its founding in 1848, Hierschau rapidly participated in the agricultural development of the Molotschna, both in the livestock and the cereal grain production. Despite what was likely a difficult beginning, Hierschau farmers by 1851 seem to have fared at least as well as their more established neighbours. Since the original complement of 30 *Wirtschaften* was occupied almost from the start, any further expansion of the village depended on the occupancy of *Kleinwirtschaften*. The people in these circumstances undoubtedly turned to some of the trades and professions to supplement their incomes. Hierschau usually had a tailor and perhaps a shoemaker among its citizens.

Hierschau was never the site of a major manufacturing concern, though some people in later years commuted to Waldheim to work in various factories. A windmill, Dutch type, was constructed, likely early in the development of the village, just north of Hierschau near the *Uetjacht*.<sup>29</sup> It was used to grind feed grain as well as whole wheat flour; for white flour the people went to the larger mills in Waldheim.<sup>30</sup>

It is not certain when the *Weisseerdegrube* (white earth pit)

was discovered in the small hills just north and east of Hierschau. White sand and various types of clay were found and dug out of pits which eventually reached a depth of 50 to 60 feet.<sup>31</sup> The land was owned by the village and leased on a yearly basis to the highest bidder. Income to the Hierschau village treasury was often more than 1000 rubles per year, in 1901 being 1600 rubles.<sup>32</sup> This additional income helped Hierschau to be a reasonably affluent village throughout much of its history.

### Church Affairs

As mentioned in a previous chapter, the original *Grosse Gemeinde* in the Molotschna had divided in 1824. The Lichtenauer *Grosse Gemeinde* separated from the original Ohrloff-Petershagen *Gemeinde*; Jakob Warkentin of Altonau was installed as the *Aeltester* of this congregation. But division was not to solve all the ecclesiastical problems. *Aeltester* Warkentin and some of his parishioners seem to have had considerable difficulty distinguishing between affairs of state and matters of the church. They felt that the colony administration, Johann Cornies in particular, had no right to inflict punishment on church members, and certainly not before the church agreed to the sentence. Finally, *Aeltester* Warkentin together with *Oberschulze* Klassen travelled to Odessa to demand disciplinary action against Cornies, even his banishment to Siberia. The chairman of the *Fuersorgekomitee* investigated the situation and found that there was indeed need for change, but it was Warkentin who was declared unworthy of his position. He was relieved of his responsibilities in 1842. The Lichtenauer *Grosse Gemeinde* was divided into three groups, Lichtenau-Petershagen with *Aeltester* Dirk Warkentin, Margenau-Schoensee (and later Landskrone) with *Aeltester* Heinrich Wiens of Margenau, and Pordenau with *Aeltester* Heinrich Toews of Pordenau. But it seems that people learn very slowly. No sooner had the dust settled, when *Aeltester* Heinrich Wiens of the Margenau-Schoensee *Gemeinde* applied the ban to three people who had, on orders of a village mayor, punished a wrongdoer. With this clear intrusion of church discipline into village law enforcement, a complaint was lodged against Wiens. The situation was personally investigated by Hahn, the chairman of the *Fuersorgekomitee*. Wiens was declared deposed, and banned from Russia for life.

The low ebb to which church life sank might best be exemplified by two inter-related episodes which occurred in mid-century Molotschna.

The Petershagen church building was found to be unsatisfac-



tory, so on recommendation of the church moderator, Johann Neufeld, a new structure was planned for Neuhalbstadt. By anticipating the use of materials from the old church, and considerable free labour by the membership, Neufeld promised to keep the costs down to 10 rubles per member. The old building was taken down in 1852 and foundations laid for a new structure. There were some delays due to the Crimean War, but when construction began in earnest, it was noted that the dimensions of the building had magically increased in size, well beyond what the congregation had planned. Eventually an agreement was reached between Neufeld and the congregation, that all members would give what they could, and Neufeld would cover the additional cost over-run. The church was dedicated on December 28, 1858, by *Aeltester* Lenzmann of Gnadenfeld. But soon thereafter Neufeld began, likely because his relatives were embroiled in another feud, claiming that the church building was really his. The church, he said, had not met its obligations. Eventually the *Fuersorgekomitee* of Odessa was asked to settle the dispute. On August 1, 1862, the church building was declared property of the original church, but Neufeld was to be reimbursed for some of the extra expenses he had incurred. The church gladly paid the money, happy to be rid of Neufeld, and finally settle the *Halbstadt Bethausstreit* (Halbstadt Church Building Dispute).<sup>33</sup>

The *Gerstenstreit* (Barley War) began innocently enough. In the spring of 1858 an Ohrloff farmer, Peter Janzen, rented some land from another farmer, Klaas Friesen. He prepared the land and sowed a crop of barley. When it came time to harvest the crop, it was discovered that Friesen had later rented the land to a second farmer. Janzen was not allowed to harvest the crop. The matter was taken to the village *Schulze* who reported to higher authorities that Janzen had been the second renter. By the time the truth eventually came out, the intrigue involved many local and district officials as well as various church *Aelteste* and deacons. Since some of the protagonists were of the Neufeld family, the Halbstadt *Bethausstreit* complicated the picture. The *Fuersorgekomitee* was again asked to mediate in this dispute, which by that time was such a tangle of regional and church politics that the original barley crop was almost forgotten.<sup>34</sup>

These two disputes do not necessarily typify the entire scope of Mennonite church life at the time, but they do demonstrate an undue preoccupation with the temporal, an unhealthy involvement of the church in local politics, and an inability to resolve problems in a fair and equitable fashion. Life was regulated in most

aspects by the Church, by the regional administration, and by the Agricultural Society. But this did not guarantee a live, active Christianity which needed to spring up new and vital in each individual life. True nurture in the Christian life was often neglected; church discipline was used more to enforce village regulations than to encourage truly moral lives.

### The Mennonite Brethren Church

While the Molotschna was a relatively isolated and self-sufficient community, it was not immune to influences from the outside world. With the establishment of a number of villages by new immigrants, a new spirit was imported. The Groningen Old Flemish who founded Gnadenfeld in 1835 continued their "Unmennonite" practices in their services, as well as their mission work and Bible study groups. They were progressive, willing to accept new ideas, and adapted to the latest religious concerns.<sup>35</sup>

Eduard Wuest, pastor of a Separatist Lutheran (Pietist) church near Berdiansk, came to exert a profound influence on the Mennonites in South Russia.<sup>36</sup> He was invited to speak at mission festivals in Gnadenfeld as early as 1846, and since he was a powerful speaker, he convinced many to repent and seek God's free grace. Wuest's popularity aroused envy and suspicion of both Lutheran and Mennonite pastors, so he was barred from preaching from the pulpits of these churches, but continued to attend devotional meetings. His early death in 1859 was taken by some as the judgment of God, but by others as Wuest's deliverance from his trials and tribulations. But the flame he had ignited continued to burn.

New life of believers did not depend on the ministry of one man. Centred particularly in Gnadenfeld and Ohrloff, Bible studies and prayer meetings continued. A group of believers felt that the closeness of their experience required the addition of communion, and this caused an open rift with their Gnadenfeld church leadership.<sup>37</sup> A number of stormy church membership meetings were held, with *Aeltester* August Lenzmann generally taking a conciliatory stand, but on December 28, 1859, Johann Claassen and those of the group who felt as he did were asked to leave the meeting. He and about ten others got up and left. This departure led to the preparation of the "Secession" or "Founding Document."<sup>38</sup> Recognizing the "decadent condition" of the Mennonite brotherhood, they completely dissociated themselves from those churches. They recognized baptism on faith, and communion as a sign of the covenant and fellowship of believers, neither of

which they considered to be present in the existing churches. They emphasized, however, that they were in full agreement with Menno Simons on all articles of their confession, and certainly considered themselves to be Mennonites. The document of secession was signed by 18 men on January 6, 1860, at the home of Isaak Koop, in Elisabeththal. This date marks the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Official reaction to this declaration was not long in coming, and considering the state of the church, was not unexpected in character. On January 18, at a conference of elders, it was decided that secession could not be tolerated. Dissidents were to be turned over to the Area Administrative Office, which then was to "dissuade them from embarking upon their erroneous intentions."<sup>39</sup> David Friesen, *Oberschulze* of the Molotschna, forbade meetings of the new group on the basis of a law forbidding meetings of secret societies.<sup>40</sup> Attempts at a negotiated peace failed. On May 30, Heinrich Huebert was elected leading minister of the break-away group, Jacob Bekker the assistant. The following week they were ordained and the organizational pattern arranged.<sup>41</sup>

Eventually the *Kleine Gemeinde*, with *Aeltester* Johann Friesen, and the Ohrloff Church, with *Aeltester* Johann Harder, recognized the Mennonite Brethren Church. Johann Claassen, after a number of trips to St. Petersburg to obtain official government recognition, finally presented his petition on May 21, 1862. It was not until May 30, 1866, that Claassen received confirmation that full religious freedom and civil privileges were guaranteed the Mennonite Brethren.<sup>42</sup>

Despite harassment by the colony administration, including court appearances and threats of exile, despite weakness in leadership, especially since Johann Claassen had to spend so much time away in St. Petersburg, and despite some early excesses resulting from a false notion of Christian freedom, the new church took hold and flourished in the various Mennonite colonies. Among the Mennonite Brethren were those from the landless group, but socioeconomic explanations do not adequately account for the formation of the new group. In the Molotschna the Brethren were found more frequently in the recently established villages, where the land problem was not as severe as in the older western section of the colony. The continued relentless opposition suffered by Mennonite Brethren in the Molotschna was at least in part responsible for the formation of the Kuban settlement by the Brethren in 1863.<sup>43</sup>

Of the original 18 Brethren who signed the document of seces-

sion, 12 were from the eastern part of the Molotschna, the more recently developed area, though none were from the line of villages of which Hierschau was a part.<sup>44</sup> It is possible that Hierschauerers participated in the church life of Waldheim or even Gnadenfeld, but none are specifically mentioned as being involved in any of the church discussions or conflicts. A number became members of the Mennonite Brethren Church some time after they moved from Hierschau, but it is quite likely that in the village itself, the *Grosse Gemeinde* continued to hold sway.

### Vital Statistics and All That

Much can be learned about the lives of ordinary people by reviewing some of the general statistics of the period. Each birth represents a happy event in a family, just as each death is a tragedy, but when we review overall trends, we can receive an impression about what people expected of life, and what their attitude to life and death may have been.

Fairly accurate Molotschna vital statistics are available for the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> Total population of the colony in 1836, 32 years after its establishment, was 9,945. This more than doubled by 1859, to 23,274 (see Table VII).

Birth rate varied from 44.2 to 55.0 per thousand population per year. By comparison, the rate in Canada was 15.1 per thousand in 1982.<sup>46</sup> The birth rate in the Molotschna was therefore at least three times that of the current Canadian average. Birth control of any kind was probably seldom practiced, the normal situation being an addition to the family every two or three years throughout the entire child-bearing years of the wife.

Between 23.4 and 29.7 people died per thousand population each year in the Molotschna, compared to the Canadian average of 7.1 in 1982. The death rate was therefore three to four times as high as we currently expect in Canada. It must be remembered that infant mortality was quite high, most families having one or two infants who died at an early age. Epidemics of infectious diseases such as diphtheria<sup>47</sup> or typhus<sup>48</sup> were common and could sweep away entire families. Conditions such as tuberculosis, easily treatable now, were often routinely fatal.

Population demographics according to age in the Molotschna are very interesting when compared to the present Canadian figures (see Table VIII). Available statistics indicate that children under the age of one year represented 4.7% of the population; in Canada it is currently about 1.46%. By school age there is a drop to 3.3% of the population per year in the Molotschna, likely due to

TABLE VII MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY MOLOTSCHNA POPULATION STATISTICS

Year	Births			Deaths			Net Gain	% Increase	Marriages	Total Population			
	Male	Female	Total	Rate Per 1000	Male	Female	Total	Rate Per 1000		Male	Female	School Age	Work Age
1836										5099	4846		
1841										6185	5936		
1844			691	55.0			295	23.4					6300
1845			646				296						
1849	387	367	754		164	163	327		144				
1850	393	347	740		153	160	313		156			3135	
1851	373	339	712	44.2	185	211	396	24.5	1.96	8209	7931	3228	
1852										8362	7995	3288	7988
1853			761	46.5			480	29.3	281				
1854	456	438	894	51.4	238	209	447	25.7	447			3251	
1855			840	47.1			529	29.7	311	9116	8718		8929
1856*										8977	8539	3489	
										9276	8872		
1859													
													23,274

\*Larger numbers for 1856 include Hutttert, smaller ones the Molotschna only. Likely most of the other statistics include Hutttert.

Sources: *UB*, April 1846, p. 3; May 1850, p. 36; August 1851, p. 61; May 1852 Beilage, pp. 1,7; July 1855, p. 59.  
*Mennonitische Blaetter*, March 1855, p. 17; July 1856, p. 51  
 Ehrt, p. 52; Klaus, p. 236; Rempel, p. 213.

TABLE VIII  
COMPARISON OF MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY  
MOLOTSCHNA\* AND CANADA 1982, 1983

AGE DISTRIBUTION				
	0-1 years	Age 7-13	Age 14-60	Over 60
MOLOTSCHNA	4.7%	19.7%	49.7%	Under 5%
CANADA	1.46%	10.2%	66.2%	13.4%

SEX DISTRIBUTION (% MALE)				
	Births	Age 7-13	Deaths	Total Population
MOLOTSCHNA	51.9	50.1	49.9	51.1
CANADA	51.3	51.3	56.2	49.5

\*Molotschna statistics are a composite of those available in the various categories from 1836 to 1856. School age in the Molotschna was 7 to 13 years. *Arbeitsfaehige* (employable) was usually age 14 to 60 years.

Sources: Molotschna statistics come from the same sources as Table VII. Canadian information is from Statistics Canada.

the high infant mortality. The *Arbeitsfaehige* (employable), usually including those between 14 and 60 years, constituted 49.7% in the Molotschna, but are 66.2% in Canada. While individuals reached a ripe old age, it is unlikely that more than 5% of the population was over 60 years at any one time in the Molotschna; in Canada it is 13.4%. These figures as a whole show the high infant and child mortality present in the mid-nineteenth century, evident in the lower percentage of people who achieved adulthood and certainly by the relatively few in the Molotschna who became senior citizens.

The slight world-wide male preponderance in births was evident in the Molotschna as well, where on average 51.9% of newborns were boys. This advantage was almost lost in the 7-13 year category, where 50.1% were male, possibly due to a slightly higher infant and early childhood mortality. In overall total population, however, males continued to have slightly more representatives, at

51.1%, whereas in Canada this slips to 49.5% (see Table VIII). The difference was likely due to a fairly high maternal mortality rate (women dying at childbirth) and because fewer people became old (in Canada there are more women than men after the age of 54, therefore in general, the older the population, the larger the percentage of women).

According to Rempel the annual increase of population among the Mennonites in Russia was 2.34 percent per year (compared to 1.62 for the Jewish population; 2.34 among the Lutherans and 2.45 among the Greek Orthodox).<sup>49</sup> Using the mid-nineteenth century statistics available to us, Rempel's figure is confirmed, the calculation being 2.36 percent per year. People were always moving in and some departed from the Moltschna, but left to the natural increase only at this rate, the population would double in 30 years.

As noted previously, the early population of Hierschau, likely of the initial 30 households, was 201. By 1851 there were 118 *Arbeitsfaehige*, extrapolating to a total population of about 242 people. By January 1, 1856, in addition to the 30 *Wirtschaften*, 27 *Anwohner* (residents without land) households had been established. The total population had risen to 366;<sup>50</sup> this increased to 391 by the

TABLE IX  
MID-CENTURY HIERSCHAU STATISTICS

	MALE	FEMALE	SCHOOL AGE	EMPLOYABLE (AGE 14-60)	TOTAL
1848	—	—	—	—	201
1851	—	—	—	118	242
					(about)
1856	192	174	97	—	366
1857	205	186	97	—	391
1860	—	—	—	—	408

Sources: *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, "Hierschau," by David H. Epp. UB, May 1852 Beilage, p. 7; May 1857; Beilage 1857, p. 26.

next year.<sup>51</sup> Males constituted 52.5% of the population, a slightly higher percentage than the Molotschna average. School-age children represented about one-quarter of the population, also higher than average, reflecting the young age of the families which



had settled in Hierschau. Obviously by the late 1850s the village had almost reached its capacity for expansion, since from 1857 to 1860 the population rose by only 17, to a total of 408.<sup>52</sup>

### The Struggle for Land

In a Christian society each person is considered to be an eternal soul, and therefore deemed to be of inestimable value. In an agricultural society the land is the principle preoccupation, is the basic sustainer of life, and therefore becomes the criterion by which values are measured. In Molotschna society there was a tension between these points of view, and one could argue that land eventually tended to rule. Originally only the landowners voted in the basic unit of colony government, the village council. Others might make appeals or requests, but the right of final decision making rested with the land.

With an expanding population, which, as we noted, could double in 30 years, it was necessary to double the number of households with each generation. In the Molotschna Colony, as in other Mennonite colonies, this was accomplished in several ways.

Some room for expansion was available within each village. The land allotment was fixed, as was the size of the *Wirtschaften*, but many villages had room for the establishment of additional yards, *Kleinwirtschaften*, which, however, had no accompanying land. It was also not uncommon for married children to live some years with their parents, often residing in the *Nebenhaus* (neighbouring house, an addition to the main house, or a separate building on the yard). These people often helped their parents manage the farm or were involved in various trades. The economic base, however, was precarious; only the landowners could vote in village councils, so the *Kleinwirtschaft* owners were definitely considered to be second class citizens. In Hierschau the original 30 *Wirtschaften* were expanded to include 27 *Anwohner* households by 1856. In 1860 all the 30 *Kleinwirtschaft* sites were occupied by sons of the earlier inhabitants. An additional space was found on the unused central street, opposite the school, so a house had been built even there.<sup>53</sup>

Once no further expansion was possible within the villages themselves, new ones were established while land was available in the colony. Hierschau was such an expansion village. Then followed the settlement of Nikolaidorf in 1851, Paulsheim in 1852, Kleefeld in 1854, Alexanderkrone, Friedensruh, Steinfeld and Mariawohl in 1857, Gnadental in 1862, Klippenfeld and Hamberg in 1863. This completed the occupation of the entire Molotschna col-



ony, filling the remaining areas north and south of Hierschau, and along the southern colony border. Several Hierschau families participated in the development of the later villages. Johann J. Regier, for example, probably helped to establish Klippenfeld in 1863.<sup>54</sup> It should be mentioned, however, that when some of the villages were planned, only the families of means could settle there, because of the strict building code prescribed by the colony administration. In Nikolaidorf, for instance, all houses had to be built with tile roofs, something which was expensive, and not all people could afford.

Another method of dealing with excess population was the development of trades, cottage industries and major industrial centres. Johann Cornies recognized this as a possible solution and actively promoted trades and industry. While still basically an agricultural society, manufacturing played an increasing role in the economy, particularly around Halbstadt, but also in other villages such as Ohrloff and Waldheim.

Many Mennonites had domestic servants, commonly from the surrounding Russian population, but other colonists and Mennonites also served. In 1851 a total of 166 Molotschna families were listed as being *Dienstboten* (domestic servants).<sup>55</sup> By 1855 this number had increased to 726 individuals, the entire complement listed as follows:<sup>56</sup>

	Male	Female
Mennonites	403	323
Colonists and Foreigners	77	62
Russians	323	110
Total	803	495

When there was no further room within villages, no additional space to accommodate new villages, the crafts were well represented in all areas, and there was a limit to the industrial employment, tensions were bound to increase. Some additional reserve land, a total of 15,820 dessiatines, was still left in the Molotschna. This was rented by large landowners and in some instances re-let at a tremendous profit.<sup>57</sup> Another 8,000 dessiatines of common village land was claimed by the landowners, and rent charged for its use. Added to this was the selfish interest of the landowners to continue to have a large landless population, providing a cheap supply of labour for agricultural operations which were labour intensive. To move elsewhere to look for work, a person needed a permit signed by the *Schulze* of the village, and was

required to pay one year's tax in advance. The landless were therefore to a considerable degree at the mercy of the *Schulze*; in this way "the landowners maintained a strict control over their practically enslaved labour force."<sup>58</sup>

In 1841 there were 1,033 landowners, with 1,700 landless families in the Molotschna. By 1851 there were 1,191 landowners, an increase of 158, but the landless families also increased, to 1,762.<sup>59</sup> Despite the formation of new villages, the percentage of landless increased slightly over the years, so that by 1865 there were 1,384 landowners, with 2,356 landless families.<sup>60</sup> Of the total Mennonite population, less than one-third were actually landowners.

With the impetus coming from skilled craftsmen and some of the educated Mennonites, the landless began to organize themselves in 1861. Groups began to petition local village authorities, but to no avail. Then they complained to the district government and to the chairman of the Agricultural Society. Since *Oberschulze* David Friesen represented what were probably the most narrow-minded and selfish landowners, and Peter Schmidt, Chairman of the Agricultural Society, was one of the worst offenders in exploitation of land rentals, it is not surprising that they turned a deaf ear. The landless then wrote directly to the *Fuersorgekomitee* in Odessa, but since there was no support from the Mennonite authorities, no action was taken. They turned to the church to help them in their plight, but many of the church leaders were themselves landowners, so only the Ohrloff *Gemeinde* supported them.

In January, 1864, the landless met in Ohrloff to draw up a list of specific proposals. First, they wished to have their grievances examined by impartial investigators. They wished to have the right to participate in elections, and wanted the unsettled crown land and village land available for the use of the landless. Negotiations and appeals continued. It should be interjected at this point that some of the landowners, such as Philip Wiebe, son-in-law of Johann Cornies, understood and sympathized with the position of the landless. On the other side, some of the voices of the landless were also harsh and strident and perhaps aroused unnecessary animosity. Nevertheless, eventually the whole process reached higher levels of government, with a direct appeal to the Ministry of State Domains. In August, 1865, an investigating team, sent on orders of the Ministry, headed by Privy Counsellor Islavin, appeared in the Molotschna.

This team carried out a thorough, and according to most

observers, a fair investigation. Specific, and in some instances drastic recommendations followed rapidly. *Oberschulze* David Friesen was released from his position and replaced by Franz Dyck of Blumenort. Proposals were made to allow *Wirtschaften* to be divided into half or even quarter farms. The crown lands and communal property were to be distributed among the landless, and they were also to have access to the village pastures. Each of the landless families was to receive 12 dessiatines of their own land, which, in addition to access to village pastureland equivalent to 2½ dessiatines, and a yard allowance of half a dessiatine, gave the *Kleinwirtschaftler* a total of 15 or 16 dessiatines.<sup>61</sup>

To institute the regulations a commission of landowners and landless was established, and legislation passed allowing the division of farms to occur. The first division occurred in the summer of 1866, the second and final one in 1869. Because of the location of the available land, some farmers found that they had to travel a number of werst to reach their own plot, but most were happy to have access to any land. After the final distribution the Molotschna consisted of:

1,235 full farms of 65 dessiatines  
 294 half farms of 32 dessiatines  
 1,566 quarter farms of 16 dessiatines.<sup>62</sup>

Hierschau also participated in this land redistribution. The original 30 *Vollwirtschaften* were occupied, probably by 1849. A further allotment of 30 *Kleinwirtschaften* was occupied in 1860, by children of the farmers. While it would be nice to postulate the ideal, it is probably more realistic to assume that tensions existed between the landed and the landless, even in this model village. Heinrich J. Thiessen, the correspondent who spared no effort to praise Hierschau and its residents, admitted that when a young Kornelius Regier was elected mayor in 1874, the people were worried: How would a young man be able to resolve what an older experienced mayor had not been able to accomplish? "In Hierschau, at the time of the *Voll- and Kleinwirtschaft* question there had been much quarrelling, and in this turmoil . . . Regier was elected."<sup>63</sup>

When the final land distribution had been completed in 1869, Hierschau received, in addition to its 1981 dessiatines, another 448 dessiatines,<sup>64</sup> presumably for division among the 30 *Kleinwirtschaften*. Each one would have received almost 15 dessiatines, likely bringing the total land for use to somewhat over the required 16 dessiatines. Some of this land was situated up to 14 werst from the

village, likely making its management far from easy. New land must have been difficult to distribute in this part of the Molotschna, since Waldheim and Landskrone *Kleinwirten* had similar distances to travel (13½ and 15½ werst respectively).

But even more equitable use and division of land within the Molotschna did not provide a permanent solution to the problem of overpopulation. People could and did migrate to other parts of Russia, such as the Crimea; in the Crimea they formed separate villages, but not specific blocks of colonies. Large numbers eventually emigrated to Canada and the United States. Many, however, wished to remain in closed Mennonite settlements, maintaining their own religious and cultural practices, yet also retaining privileges. By 1860 the Russian government was no longer willing to give the Mennonites large tracts of land, so eventually they purchased large areas, usually from the landed nobility. With the land redistribution of the 1860s, arrangements had been made to raise funds for such future purchases, by renting certain land and by taxing the colonists. The first colony founded by the Molotschna in this manner was Sagraadowka, on land purchased in the Kherson area in 1872 from Count Kochubei. For the 21,276 dessiatines a total of 500,003 rubles were paid, allowing 484 families to settle in 17 villages.

In 1884 Memrik with 10 villages, in 1891 Neu Samara with 12 villages, in 1895 Orenburg with 8 villages, and in 1901 Terek with 15 villages were also initiated by the Molotschna.<sup>65</sup> Chortitza, and eventually even some of the daughter colonies also established new settlements. Other colonies, such as the Kuban, were combined efforts, in this case largely the Mennonite Brethren, from the Molotschna and the Chortitza.

The people of Hierschau participated in many of these ventures, some moving to the newly established colonies in Russia, and a fair number even emigrating to the United States of America. The next chapter will be the story of this moving out from their model home in the Molotschna.

## An Evaluation

It is perhaps a paradox that a community, initially bent on sharing its faith far and wide, but by the strictures of necessity eventually restricting its principal witness to being a good example, should be such a poor example. In things that really mattered to the individual, religious practices and the distribution of land, the Mennonite Commonwealth was unable to solve its own problems. Undoubtedly neither the Russian officialdom nor the surrounding

population were impressed by the repeated necessity of government intervention to help resolve both the religious and the land questions. Yet a whole society must not be judged by the selfish acts of a few. It so happens that at crucial times the positions of power in mid-century Molotschna were in the hands of those more interested in serving their own, very narrow ends. It is left for us to judge whether this was a strange, unusual quirk of history or if it was a true representation of the state of affairs.



## V MOVING OUT

Many of the original Hierschau settlers were relatively young, with four or five children, so in the first few years not much expansion was required. About ten or twelve years after its founding, however, when the older children wanted to establish their own homes, there were rapidly increasing requirements for new households in Hierschau. So it was that by 1860 all of the allotted 30 *Kleinwirtschaften* were occupied, mostly by children of the original settlers. Any further expansion would have to be accomplished by moving out.

### Crimea

The Crimean War broke out in late 1853 as part of an ongoing struggle between Russia and the Turkish Ottoman Empire. The immediate cause of hostilities were Russian and French demands over treatment of pilgrims at the holy places in Palestine. Significant underlying reasons were Russian designs to increase influence in the Balkans, and to gain access to the Mediterranean Sea by controlling Constantinople. These plans were of course opposed by Turkey, but also by Britain and France, who saw their world strategies imperiled by this expansion.

With the outbreak of war, Allied fleets eventually entered the Black Sea, and large armies landed on the beaches of the Crimean Peninsula. Maneuvers and counter-maneuvers followed with bloody pitched battles fought at the River Alma, Balaklava, Inkerman, Eupatoria and Tchernayg. Bravery alone did not help; the Russian armies were defeated. Despite heroic defensive efforts the Russian fortress at Sevastopol fell on September 11, 1855. The peace process led to a declaration of armistice on all fronts, which by then included the Baltic and Caucasus, as well as the Black Sea areas. The Treaty of Paris was signed March 30, 1856, to end all hostilities.<sup>1</sup> In this agreement further expansion of Russia towards the Mediterranean was halted, and Russian naval power in the Black Sea neutralized. Internally Russia was jolted into the realization that she was basically a poorly organized, and somewhat backward country, and that changes were necessary.<sup>2</sup>

The Mennonite colonies, particularly the Molotschna, were uncomfortably close to the centre of hostilities during the Crimean War. By that time many Mennonites considered themselves to be full-fledged and often patriotic Russian citizens, and while they did not participate in the actual fighting, they did contribute to the war effort. They were friendly and co-operative to troops moving

through the area and gave considerable help transporting them in their farm wagons. The Molotschna Mennonites took full responsibility for the care and provision of 5,000 wounded and sick soldiers from Simferopol. They also provided supplies and helped with transport of equipment in the Crimea itself, as a result of which a good number "also gave their lives in loving service to the Fatherland. Many were infected and died . . . as a consequence of the military epidemics . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Partly as a result of the transportation duties which young Mennonite men had participated in during the Crimean War, the Mennonites became acquainted with the area.<sup>4</sup> In 1860, when land was being evaluated for settlement, the mild climate and relatively good soil of the Crimea was found to be much preferable to the far distant cold stretches of Siberia. In 1862 four Mennonite villages were established in the Crimea on purchased and leased land. Eventually a total of 70 villages were formed, including larger centres such as Spat and Karassan, though most were quite small. They were scattered throughout almost the entire peninsula, usually along roads or railroads.<sup>5</sup>

At least six Hierschau families moved to the Crimea from 1860 to 1862, five of them being original settlers. Of the five original settlers, the Peter Engbrechts, Heinrich Loewens, Jakob Loewens and Tobias Unruhs are all recorded as moving to Bruderfeld, a small settlement near the north-east coast of the Crimea. The Jakob Pankratz family also moved to the Crimea, specific village not given, although it could have been Bruderfeld. Johann and Margaretha (daughter of Peter Engbrecht) Penner moved to Karassan, one of the major Mennonite settlements in central Crimea.<sup>6</sup>

Though the distance from Hierschau to Bruderfeld was about 200 werst, there appears to have been considerable communication between the home village and the new pioneers in the Crimea. The Jakob Thiessens of Hierschau often visited their former neighbours, where their son, Heinrich, could maintain his childhood friendships. Letters were also exchanged, but apparently with time this tapered off.<sup>7</sup>

The Crimean group seems to have formed a fairly intimate social unit, with a number of the children intermarrying. Johann Engbrecht, for example, married Katharina Unruh on June 10, 1873.

Either things did not go quite as well as expected in the Crimea (the climate was pleasant, but the soil in some areas was poor and the water supply scarce), or distant pastures were simply greener.



When emigration to America became an option, all five of the original Hierschau settlers, turned Crimean pioneers, again pulled up their roots and emigrated to the United States. The Tobias Unruhs, together with their married son Johann and his wife, crossed the Atlantic Ocean on the S.S. Hammonia, landing in New York on August 15, 1873. They settled near Parker, in Turner County, South Dakota, on the bald wide open prairie. Their reports back home must have been good, since they were followed the next year by the Peter Engbrechts with two sets of married children, and the Jakob Loewens with married and single children. These families crossed the sea on the S.S. Silesia, landing in New York on July 8, 1874. The Heinrich Loewens followed a month later. The Pankratz family also emigrated in the summer of 1874, settling somewhere in "Dakota", possibly in the same locale.

The Hierschauers, turned Crimeans, turned South Dakotans, obviously continued to form a relatively close-knit group, since the intermarriage of children continued. Anna Unruh married Kornelius Loewen on Christmas Day, 1876. Maria Loewen married Kornelius Unruh about two years later, December 26, 1878. Soon after they arrived in South Dakota, evangelistic meetings were held in the area, and some of the former Hierschauers were converted, baptized, and joined the local Mennonite Brethren congregation. Campaigns were held in 1877, possibly in 1885, as well as in 1892, with at least ten of the original Hierschau pioneers or their children involved.<sup>8</sup> Mennonite Brethren began meeting in homes in the area in 1876, then organized as a congregation in 1878, with Heinrich Adrian as leading minister.<sup>9</sup> The influence of former Crimeans, among them the Hierschauers, must have been considerable, for the congregation was named Bruderfeld, likely in fond memory of their former home.

In 1897-1899 a number of families from Minnesota and South Dakota, several undoubtedly from near Parker, again sought newer territory, moving ever farther north and west. They settled six miles west of Waldheim, Saskatchewan.<sup>10</sup> Mennonite Brethren in this area started to meet in homes, eventually organizing a group and building a church in 1901 — called Bruderfeld.<sup>11</sup> Jakob L. Loewen, son of the original Hierschau settler Jakob Loewen, was among those who moved to the new Bruderfeld (see capsule biography). Tobias Unruh, son of the original Tobias Unruh, also moved to Saskatchewan, although the specific location is not known.

Many members of the Hierschau group continued to live near Parker, and likely died there. A few followed their children further

south. Helena Adrian (nee Loewen) moved to Buhler, Kansas in 1902, and Helena Loewen (nee Unruh) moved to Hillsboro in 1913.

The migration of Hierschauer to the Crimea did not follow the pattern one would ordinarily expect. Rather than young, newly married couples leaving, entire established family units moved as a block. Whether this meant that there were tensions in the village due to deep-seated problems, or if it was simply wanderlust, is not known. Subsequent moving by many of the people would lend some credence to the wanderlust theory.

### Molotschna Expansion

Hierschau itself was an expansion village in the development of the Molotschna, but expansion did not stop there. Another ten villages were established from Nikolaidorf in 1851 to Klippenfeld and Hamberg in 1863. Children of original Hierschau settlers, likely because of lack of further space at home, moved to a number of these villages.

Johann J. Regier, son of original settler Johann Regier, moved to Klippenfeld with his wife and two children. Since they moved in 1863, the year it was founded, they were likely part of the pioneering group. They were followed by a number of other members of the Regier family, Gerhard Fast (wife was Elisabeth Regier), Peter, Heinrich and Klaas Regier.<sup>12</sup>

Peter Schroeter<sup>13</sup>, as well as Bernhard Harms and his parents<sup>14</sup>, moved to Friedensruh, another expansion village, though the exact time of their departure from Hierschau is not recorded.

### America

Goaded into action, at least in part because of the failures in the Crimean War, the government was instituting changes in Russia. The sleeping giant was waking up.

After the defeat of Russian arms, reforms of the military were obviously necessary. Following the plans of Dmitri Miliutin, the Ministry of War was reorganized. Reforms in the education and training of recruits were introduced, and criteria for exclusion from conscription were changed. In November, 1870, Czar Alexander II approved a plan to investigate universal conscription. This received the immediate attention of the Mennonites, and a series of representatives were sent to St. Petersburg to present their strenuous objections to the scheme. The Mennonites were informed that the new law would not allow exemptions or substitutes. They were assured, however, that Mennonites would not be obliged to bear arms, but instead could serve in the hospital services. Despite

Mennonite protests, the lawmaking process continued, and on January 1, 1874, the new law was published. Mennonites were not exempt from service, but were for all time excused from bearing arms, and could fulfil the service by non-combatant duties in hospitals, or work in army or navy workshops. This did not apply to outsiders who joined the Mennonites, nor to those who came to Russia after the law was passed.<sup>15</sup> Further negotiations continued, and eventually a scheme was worked out whereby special closed forestry units could be established (called *Forstei*), provided the Mennonites would bear the costs of maintaining the workers and also build the barracks.<sup>16</sup> The first barracks for the *Forstei* were begun in 1880.

At the same time there was increasing pressure to remove or modify other privileges of all foreign colonists, including the Mennonites. The schools increasingly came under the jurisdiction of Russian authorities, largely to increase the use of the Russian language in these institutions. The *Zentralschulen* (highschools) were ordered to use Russian as a language of instruction: scholarships were established to encourage Mennonites to study Russian; and Russian teachers and inspectors were sent to help arrange curriculum and suggest appropriate text books. In 1871, with new administrative changes which occurred throughout Russia, it was made known that henceforth all correspondence and records in *Wolost* offices were to be in Russian.

The conscription and language issues were highlighted in one episode, which demonstrated the fundamental tensions between a government bent on homogenizing its citizens, and a special group equally determined to maintain its privileges. The Mennonites presented a petition to the Minister of State Domains, Count Zelenoi, outlining their objections to universal conscription. When the Count found that some of the members of the delegation spoke little or no Russian, he berated them for their sin, stating that it was inexcusable to have lived in Russia for 75 years, and yet not understand the language of their fatherland!

Many Mennonites were feeling increasingly uncomfortable with what they thought to be direct violation of terms under which they had initially settled in Russia. They considered both conscription, even with alternate service, and Russification, to be factors which would directly impact on their faith, and therefore intolerable. There were those who felt that compromises could be and were worked out, which would preserve the essentials of Mennonite faith and culture. Those who found any concessions to be an impingement on their rights began the search for another home.

Cornelius Janzen, a Berdiansk merchant, as well as others, had since the late 1860s begun investigating the possibility of leaving Russia, with the United States and Canada as possible places to migrate to. In the meantime, John F. Funk, an American editor of *Herold der Wahrheit*, began advocating such a move. He provided his Russian coreligionists with needed information about the resources, industries, customs of the people, and in particular the laws governing military service in the United States.<sup>17</sup> When the American government agencies and the railroads became aware of the possibility of emigration, they were very interested in helping these thrifty and industrious people.

Negotiations in Russia continued, but when it appeared to some that they would not likely come to a successful conclusion, specific plans for emigration were initiated. A deputation of twelve European Mennonite and Hutterite leaders was sent to "spy out" the land, arriving in North America in several groups in the spring of 1873. Elders Jakob Buller of Alexanderwohl and Leonhard Sudermann of Berdiansk were the Molotschna representatives.<sup>18</sup> Many areas of Canada and the United States were inspected by some or all of the delegates, with particular attention to Manitoba and the central and northern states.<sup>19</sup> Finally they returned home in September, full of praise for all they had seen in the New World. The friendly attitudes, excellent settlement opportunities and promises of freedom persuaded many Russian Mennonites that their land of opportunity lay across the ocean. Added to these factors was the helping hand extended by the Mennonites of Ontario and the United States, who raised over \$100,000 to help defray transportation and settlement costs.<sup>20</sup>

After the new law confirming military conscription in Russia was passed on January 1, 1874, many Mennonites began to plan and prepare for emigration. But the Russian government did not look with favour on the possibility of losing large numbers of model farmers, so in April of 1874, General Eduard Todleben was sent to investigate the complaints and to allay the fears of the Mennonites.<sup>21</sup> Some who had been prepared to leave, changed their minds and stayed. Many others continued their preparations and eventually departed. Todleben classified the emigrants into a number of categories which probably fairly represented the attitudes of most.

1. Fanatics stimulated by wild, often unfounded rumours, open to any suggestions to leave Russia, not really open to reasoning.

2. Those hoping to strike it rich in the New World; this would include the poor as well as those who might wish to speculate.
3. The largest group were those who were afraid of the changes occurring in Russia, and wished to resume in their new home the ordained way of faith and life as they understood it. Included in this group were those who also wished to be separated from their other Russian coreligionists, to live in more closed isolated communities.<sup>22</sup>

In all, from 1873 to 1884, approximately 18,000 Mennonites emigrated from Russia, representing from one-quarter to one-third of the total Russian Mennonite population.<sup>23</sup> Approximately 8,000 settled in Manitoba. Since concessions in Canada were considered to be more generous and secure, those settling in Manitoba tended to feel more strongly about setting up separate, closed communities. A larger proportion of Chortitza and Fuerstenland emigrants were among these, as well as the entire Bergthal Colony and the *Kleine Gemeinde* from the Molotschna. Of the 10,000 who chose the United States, 5,000 moved to Kansas, 1,800 each to Minnesota and the Dakota territory, and most of the remaining 1,400 to Nebraska. The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren tended to choose the United States, as did the Mennonite Brethren. Most of the Molotschna emigrants settled south of the 49th parallel, almost the entire Alexanderwohl congregation moving to Kansas.

Exact statistics are difficult to obtain, but according to known sources, between 1873 and 1880 a total of 580 families, consisting of 3240 people, left the Chortitza Colony, 440 families of about 3000 individuals left Bergthal, and 107 families left the Crimea. The precise number of Mennonites leaving the Molotschna is not known, but Urry estimates it at roughly 784 families,<sup>24</sup> which could represent about 4500 individuals, or almost 20% of the entire population.

The factors that affected emigration of Mennonites from Russia obviously were relevant in Hierschau, since a large number of its citizens elected to pack their bags and depart, mainly to the United States. There is specific documentation that from 1874 to 1879 at least 113, quite possibly up to 130 people moved directly from Hierschau to America. This represented a total of at least 26 family units. The first year of major emigration, 1874, saw ten families consisting of 55 individuals say farewell. Obviously people cooperated with one another and made joint arrangements, since the entire Wall clan (five families and 28 individuals) and the

TABLE X  
HIERSCHAU EMIGRATION TO THE  
UNITED STATES

FAMILY	SIZE OF FAMILY	ARRIVAL DATE	DESTINATION
Gerhard Goossen	9	Aug. 27, 1874	Marion, S. Dakota
David Buller	8	Sept. 3, 1874	South Dakota
Peter Buller	4	Sept. 3, 1874	South Dakota
Johann Janzen	3	Sept. 3, 1874	Henderson, Neb.
Peter Lender	2	Sept. 3, 1874	Henderson, Neb.
Jakob Janzen	10	Sept. 3, 1874	Henderson, Neb.
Jakob M. Wall	6	Sept. 3, 1874	Henderson, Neb.
Kornelius M. Wall	7	Sept. 3, 1874	Henderson, Neb.
Jakob Voth	2	Sept. 3, 1874	South Dakota
Gerhard Buschmann	4	1874	Gnadenau, Kansas
Isaak Goertzen	4	Aug. 4, 1875	Henderson, Neb.
Johann Plett	5	Aug. 4, 1875	possibly Mountain Lake, Minnesota
Tobias Kunkel	3	1875	Parker, S. Dakota
Tobias Kunkel (Jr.)	3	1875	Parker, S. Dakota
Mr. Duerksen	3	1875	Parker, S. Dakota
Heinrich Buller	4	May 24, 1877	Henderson, Neb.
Isaak and Gerhard Regier	2	May 26, 1878	Henderson, Neb.
Peter Friesen	12	July 2, 1878	Henderson, Neb.
Isaak Toews	4	July 2, 1878	Henderson, Neb.
Susanna Goertzen	5	June 24, 1879	Henderson, Neb.
Kornelius Regier	5	June 24, 1879	Henderson, Neb.
Abram and David Doerksen	2	1870s	Oklahoma
Mr. Goossen	3	?	Nebraska
Peter Reimer	?	?	Kansas
Johann Weber	?	?	Nebraska
Johann Wiens	?	?	Marion, S. Dakota

Sources: Clarence Hiebert, ed., *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1974), many ship lists throughout the book.

Stanley E. Voth, ed., *Henderson Mennonites* (Henderson Centennial Committee, 1975), pp. 237-255.

Many letters to the *MR* by H.J. Thiessen, David Buller and others.

Obituaries in the *MR* and *Zionsbote*

York and Hamilton County Records

Goertzen, Plett and Wall Family Histories.

Bullers (at least three families and 14 individuals) crossed the ocean together on the S.S. Teutonia, landing in New York on September 3, 1874. With 42 Hierschauers on board they could have almost taken over the ship! Another five families departed from Hierschau in 1875, with at least another six families pulling up roots from 1877 to 1879 (see Tables X and XI for details).

TABLE XI  
HIERSCHAUERS EMIGRATING DIRECTLY  
TO THE UNITED STATES

YEAR	FAMILIES	INDIVIDUALS
1874	10	55
1875	5	18
1876	0	0
1877	1	4
1878	3	18
1879	2	10
Year not known	5	8
TOTAL	26	113

The largest contingent of Hierschau emigrants settled in York and Hamilton Counties, Nebraska, near Henderson. Altogether at least 14 families with 68 persons elected this area as their new home. Most of these families are listed in a recent history of the Henderson Mennonites, with many of their descendants still living in the area.<sup>25</sup> The wide open plains of South Dakota, mostly Turner County near Parker, attracted eight families of 33 individuals. Among these were two families of original Hierschau settlers, the David Bullers, by then consisting of three families with 14 people and the Tobias Kunkels, two families with six people. A few Hierschauers also moved to Kansas, Minnesota and Oklahoma (see Table XII for details).



TABLE XII  
NEW HOMES IN THE UNITED STATES

PLACE	FAMILIES	INDIVIDUALS
Henderson, Nebraska	14	68
South Dakota (Mostly Parker)	8	33
Kansas	2	5
Minnesota	1	5
Oklahoma	1	2
TOTAL	26	113

Earlier in this chapter it was described how five families of the original Hierschauers had moved south to the Crimea. All of these families, by this time expanded to at least 14 family units, elected to seek their fortunes in the New World. Most, if not all, settled in Turner County, near Parker, in South Dakota. Therefore the 33 old Hierschauers of this Crimea group again lived in the same area, worshipped in the same churches and were neighbours to the 33 Hierschauers who had emigrated directly from the Molotschna.

Another group of Hierschauers, notably the Regier clan, had from 1863 onward moved to Klippenfeld, another village in the Molotschna. All the Regiers, including those from Klippenfeld and those who had remained in Hierschau, emigrated to the United States in the late 1870s. The four families of 24 individuals who came directly from Hierschau and the six Klippenfeld families (consisting of nine former Hierschauers), mainly chose Henderson as their home. They played an important part in the subsequent development of this community. Peter Regier was one of the organizers of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Henderson (see capsule biography). Johann J. Regier, Peter's older brother, was asked to be the elder of this newly established church, and held this post for 20 years (see capsule biography). (For more details of the Crimean and Klippenfeld migrations see Table XIII.)

The total population of Hierschau in 1860 was 408, and is not likely to have exceeded 500 by 1874, especially since a number of groups of people had moved out in the 1860s. The 26 families of at least 113 individuals who left therefore represented at least one-quarter of the Hierschau population. This is a large part of the village population, higher than the average of about 20% for the Molotschna as a whole.

While general reasons for the massive Mennonite migration to



TABLE XIII  
INDIRECT HIERSCHAU EMIGRATION  
TO THE UNITED STATES

Last Residence in Russia	Number of Hirschauers	Destination in U.S.A.
Crimea	33	Probably all to Parker, S. Dakota
Klippenfeld	9	Henderson, Neb. Albion, Neb. Minnesota
Alexanderkrone	1	Henderson, Neb.
Mariental	1	Henderson, Neb.

Sources: For Johann and Peter Regier see capsule biographies Clarence Hiebert, ed., *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1974), pp. 295, 347, 348.

Stanley E. Voth, ed., *Henderson Mennonites* (Henderson Centennial Committee, 1975), pp. 237-255.

Obituaries in *Zionsbote*:

Susanna Unruh, 28 January 1925.

Elisabeth Fast, 15 March 1916.

Jakob Regier, 24 June 1914.

Many letters to the *MR* by H.J. Thiessen

North America have been documented, we are left to speculate as to why such a large proportion of Hirschauers chose to resettle. There were undoubtedly not enough *Wirtschaften* to go around. The age of the original founding families was such that by the 1860s and 1870s a large number of children would reach the age where new families were being established. Expansion or moving out was therefore inevitable. It is also possible that an element of restlessness, a desire to seek something new, may have played a part. Perhaps those who were willing to pioneer a new village never lost their spirit, and now felt it was time to move on to new horizons. Hirschau had not been spared the complications of the land struggle. Since Hirschau was to be a model village, with the *Wirtschaften* and land an integral part of this image, and therefore

valued even more highly than usual, the conflict over land may have been particularly bitter in Hierschau. Lingering resentment, spilling over into the next decade,<sup>26</sup> could have caused some Hierschauers to leave at the first good opportunity. Religious orientation may have played some part in the emigration to America, although no clear evidence is available. The founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church appeared to have little, if any, impact in Hierschau itself, so presumably most Hierschauers remained content members of the *Grosse Gemeinde* (likely the Margenau-Schoensee congregation). I have found reference to only one Hierschauer, a Maria Buller (nee Lohrenz), who was baptized and joined the Mennonite Brethren while living in Hierschau at that time, and she had moved in from Margenau.<sup>27</sup> When the Regier family moved to Klippenfeld, however, a number soon became members of the M.B. Church, several (Johann and Peter) becoming ministers. A fair proportion of those migrating directly to the United States, both to Parker, South Dakota and to Henderson, Nebraska, were soon baptized and joined the Brethren. This may be evidence of an orientation which originally caused the move, then culminated in eventual joining of the church. But it could also be simple circumstance that people happened to move into developing areas where Mennonite Brethren influence was strong, and, having been under the influence, they decided to throw in their lot with the neighbours.

A move from Russia to America was a major undertaking. Distances were far, the travel slow and infrequent, so that for all intents and purposes the move meant a total separation from family and friends. Probably because of this factor, some of the people moved from Hierschau to the United States as complete family blocks. The Wall family, consisting of parents and four other families, all departed at one time, and likely left no members in Hierschau. The Regier family similarly chose the New World. A large portion of the Buller family moved, although some of the married children stayed behind.<sup>28</sup>

While further direct contact was difficult and visits seldom occurred, efforts were made to continue contacts through letters and the newspapers. It appears, however, judging by the frequent complaints about the lack of hearing from them,<sup>29</sup> that the American Hierschauers were somewhat lax in their literary efforts. Most likely the difficulties of pioneering on the bald prairies of Nebraska and South Dakota demanded strenuous efforts and total commitment, leaving letter writing far from the top of their list of priorities. Heinrich J. Thiessen, a Hierschauer moved to Michailowka near the

Molotschna, tried to make up for this lack of communication. He considered it his duty to remind the considerable number of his Hierschau compatriots who were spread across many states of the Union and provinces of the Dominion, of their home village. Thiessen's reports in *Mennonitische Rundschau* make Hierschau one of the best described villages in the Molotschna (see capsule biography of H.J. Thiessen).

## Daughter Colonies

Despite the loss of considerable numbers of people to America, the Molotschna population again began to expand. Further provision had to be made for additional households and farms. A whole series of daughter colonies was established, with Hierschauer participants in many of these. Undoubtedly whole families also moved to some of these colonies, but quite often the parents continued to live in the old homestead, with the newly married children moving out to pioneer the new areas. The Peter Boldt family was such an instance, where the parents, original Hierschau settlers, lived and eventually died in Hierschau, but their children scattered in all directions, to Sagradowka, Memrik, Orenburg and Terek.<sup>30</sup>

A brief list of some Hierschauer families who moved to the various daughter colonies, often when these settlements were first established, is as follows: (this list is undoubtedly incomplete).

1. Sagradowka (1872) — children of Peter Boldt<sup>31</sup>
2. Turkestan (1880) — Peter Ekk  
— Johann Doerksen (single)<sup>32</sup>
3. Memrik (1884) — children of Peter Boldt<sup>33</sup>  
— Peter Plett, son of Julius Plett<sup>34</sup>
4. Alexanderpol (1888), a village established near Memrik<sup>35</sup>  
— Bernard Wall . . . . . 200 dessiatines  
— Heinrich Thiessen . . . . 60 dessiatines  
— Heinrich Koehn . . . . . 30 dessiatines  
— Jakob Neufeld . . . . . 30 dessiatines  
— Johann Funk . . . . . 30 dessiatines<sup>36</sup>
5. Neu Samara (1891) — Gerhard Aron Fast<sup>37</sup>  
— Jakob Plett<sup>38</sup>  
— Helena Janz (nee Boese)<sup>39</sup>  
— Peter Isaak Wall (1894)<sup>40</sup>  
— Heinrich Plett (1895)<sup>41</sup>
6. Orenburg (1895) — children of Peter Boldt<sup>42</sup>  
— Johann Loewen<sup>43</sup>

7. Terek (1901)<sup>44</sup>
  - children of Peter Boldt<sup>45</sup>
  - H.J. Thiessen wanted to go, but was not successful in lottery to obtain a *Wirtschaft* (1904)<sup>46</sup>
8. Siberia (early 1900s), up to 100 Mennonite villages were established on a voluntary basis.
  - Heinrich Sperling<sup>47</sup>
  - Peter Isaak Wall<sup>48</sup>

We have taken a brief look at the major migrations in which Hierschau villagers participated. Besides the larger trends there were, however, other individuals and families who moved both in and out of the village. A number of families emigrated to the United States in 1880s, with at least one departing in 1892. There was also considerable moving from village to village within the Molotschna. Teachers and their families would have to follow job opportunities and sometimes relocated every few years. The general character and tradition of Hierschau likely stabilized, however, and remained relatively static after the great exodus of the 1870s. The land, after some controversy, was more equitably distributed. An effective mechanism had been found to drain off the inevitable population increase. Agriculture flourished. Hierschau was ready to enter its Golden Age.

JOHANN J. REGIER  
The Itinerant Minister  
(1839-1902)

Johann J. Regier was born in the village of Gnadenheim in the Molotschna on March 22, 1839.<sup>1</sup> His father's name was Johann, the name of his mother is not known. His parents moved to Hierschau as founding settlers, likely in 1848. By then they had at least four children, in time having a total of 13. Among the younger children of the family were Kornelius, who later became *Schulze* of Hierschau, and Peter, who helped found the Mennonite Brethren Church in Henderson, Nebraska.

Johann probably started his village school in Gnadenheim, then completed it in Hierschau. He likely participated, being the eldest son, in the hard work required of pioneers when the family moved to their new home in 1848.

In 1858 Johann married Katharina Franzen<sup>2</sup> and settled down in Hierschau as a farmer. The first children born into this family were:

Susanna (later Unruh) — born October 4, 1859<sup>3</sup>

Katharina (later Schmidt) — born October 19, 1861<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after the birth of Katharina the young family moved to Klippenfeld, likely when the village was established in 1863. This was necessary because no *Wirtschaften* were available in the home village of Hierschau, and the Regier family had at least eight boys who could be potential owners of the family farm.

A total of seven children, six daughters and one son, were born into the Johann Regier family; as well as Susanna and Katharina there were Anna (1865) and Elisabeth (1869). Three children died in early childhood. After sharing joys and sorrows for 17 years Johann's wife Katharina died in February, 1875, while giving birth to her seventh child, Sara. Sara died six months later.

On September 7, 1875, Johann was married again, to Maria Schellenberg, the 19 year old sister of Elder Abraham Schellenberg. This marriage was blessed by six children. One of these children was Johann S. Regier, born in Klippenfeld on March 6, 1879, who later became a travelling minister for the Mennonite Brethren Church.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile in Hierschau, father Regier died in 1866. His wife, the mother of Johann, married a Siebert from Margenau, but continued to live in Hierschau. In the summer of 1872 both of the

Sieberts died in one day of cholera, part of an epidemic which was sweeping through Russia at that time. In August, 1872, the Siebert property was put up for public auction and a younger brother, Kornelius Regier, bought the *Wirtschaft*.<sup>6</sup>

In 1870 both Johann and his wife Katharina, following a conversion experience, were baptized and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church. On April 10, 1873, he was ordained as a "teacher of God's Word." Johann's occupation continued to be farming, based in Klippenfeld, but in the off season he travelled widely, sometimes with other ministers, preaching, teaching and counselling wherever he went.<sup>7</sup>

Possibly motivated by a desire to help the struggling church in America, the Regier family left the Molotschna in mid May, 1879, together with about 700 to 800 other Mennonites.<sup>8</sup> They travelled to Antwerp by train, where they boarded the S.S. Switzerland with four single children, as well as eldest daughter Susanna and her husband Peter Unruh. The younger brother, Kornelius, who had bought the family *Wirtschaft* in Hierschau, and subsequently became *Schulze* of Hierschau, was also on board.<sup>9</sup> They arrived in Philadelphia on June 24, then the next day began the four day train trip to Nebraska.

The Johann Regier family settled in Boone County, Nebraska, where Regier helped establish a congregation which had a membership of 50 within a few years. On October 16, 1881, he was ordained as elder by Abraham Schellenberg.

Peter Regier, a younger brother of Johann, had been active in the Henderson area of Nebraska,<sup>10</sup> and helped establish a Mennonite Brethren congregation there in 1878.<sup>11</sup> In 1882 a call was extended to Elder Johann Regier to become the leader of this church, a position which he held until his death.

Johann Regier continued making a living as a full time farmer, was the leading minister of the Henderson congregation, but also continued his itinerant ministry. At his home church he was a counsellor who was sought after; his opinion was valued at congregational business meetings. Elder Regier also served other Nebraska congregations on occasion, and in 1895 travelled to Oklahoma, Texas and California to help new congregations. He was active in many aspects of conference work.<sup>12</sup> He was chairman of the first Mennonite Brethren conference in North America, and served on the Home Missions committee.<sup>13</sup>

In 1895 Elder Regier took his family on an extended trip to Russia, where he visited his old home Klippenfeld,<sup>14</sup> as well as Waldheim and other villages in the Molotschna, likely including

Hierschau. He also travelled through the Crimea<sup>15</sup> and Chortitza,<sup>16</sup> holding public meetings in many places, and making many *Hausbesuche* (home visits). He participated in many of the celebrations and festivities, but also was speaker at a funeral. The trip was complicated by an outbreak of smallpox, in which children Johann and Abraham became seriously ill.<sup>17</sup> The family was delayed near Berlin, Germany, for six weeks while the boys recovered. This brush with death seems to have stimulated the young Johann to seriously ponder the meaning of life and death, leading to his conversion. Later that year he was baptized, and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church. He followed in the footsteps of his father, eventually serving the church as a travelling evangelist and Bible lecturer.<sup>18</sup> The Regiers arrived back home in June, 1896.

Elder Regier came back from Russia a tired man, which is not surprising, considering what his agenda had been. It was reported that the trip had exhausted him, and that he had to have peace and quiet because his nervous system had suffered through the sad experiences.<sup>19</sup> He did, however, regain his strength and continue his work in the church, including his itinerant ministry. The work in the church was made more difficult because some of the other leading teachers had moved away from Henderson. To this was added a serious controversy, regarding the role and function of the Holy Spirit, through which Regier tried to guide his congregation.<sup>20</sup>

Early in 1902, Johann Regier started to have more serious stomach and nervous troubles. Symptoms gradually increased, slowly sapping his strength; he preached his last sermon on March 9, using Psalm 23 as his text. He received many guests in his home, taking the opportunity to expound the Word of God to them. When he was admonished that the talking was too hard for him, he replied, "Even if I give my body as a sacrifice, I will be glad to do it, since Christ has given his life for us . . ." <sup>21</sup>

Despite much suffering, Johann was able to accept the situation with equanimity, in the knowledge that his pain was insignificant compared to the glory he was anticipating in the hereafter. During the last two weeks he became weaker and weaker; he said farewell to his loved ones and asked the Lord to bless them; he prayed for the church, particularly the weaker members. He died July 8, 1902, and his funeral was on July 11. A mission festival, in which he would have loved to participate, had been planned for July 11, so the festival was held in the morning, and the funeral replaced the previously planned program in the afternoon. Peter Regier, Johann's younger brother, delivered the funeral oration using Revelation 7:9-17 as text, pointing out that God would wipe

away all tears of sorrow.<sup>22</sup>

The ministry of Elder Johann J. Regier had been appreciated, and was summed up by H.E. Wiens, "In these early years the church endured severe testings, but they were weathered through the wise counsel and guidance of Elder Regier."<sup>23</sup>



PETER REGIER  
The Zealous Preacher  
(1847-1904)

Peter Regier was born October 21, 1847<sup>1</sup>, in Gnadenheim, in the Molotschna. He was the younger brother of Johann J. Regier, later Elder of the Henderson M.B. Church, and of Kornelius Regier, *Schulze* of Hierschau in the 1870s.

Peter's family moved from Gnadenheim to Hierschau probably in 1848, soon after he was born. In all there were 13 children, with Peter likely near the middle. He grew up and received his primary education in Hierschau. In 1866, when Peter was 19, his father Johann died, then later his mother remarried but continued to live in Hierschau.

On January 4, 1868 Peter married Katharina Quiring of Kleefeld,<sup>2</sup> and the young couple followed some of the other members of the Regier family to Klippenfeld, another village in the Molotschna. In 1870 both husband and wife were converted; they were baptized and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1873.

In 1876 the Peter Regier family emigrated to the United States, likely together with Heinrich, a younger brother, and his family. Peter Regier, wife Katharina and children Johann, Peter, Kornelius, Jakob and Heinrich, crossed the ocean on the S.S. *Vaderland* arriving in Philadelphia on July 28, 1876.<sup>3</sup> Both families settled in Minnesota. But tragedy soon struck, and Peter's youngest son Heinrich died as well as his brother Heinrich and his children. Late in the fall of 1876 the Peter Regiers moved to Nebraska, putting down roots in Hamilton County, near Henderson.

Peter, apparently a zealous young man, was soon noticed in the area. One Mennonite woman made this entry in her diary: "Now a disturber of the peace — like those we had in Russia — has come here too, with his gospel preaching."<sup>4</sup> Henry Nickel and Peter Regier visited people, held Bible studies and prayer meetings and preached. Soon a core group of Mennonite Brethren started to meet, and in 1878 a small congregation was formed. Though not by a unanimous vote, Peter Regier was chosen as the first leader.<sup>5</sup> Problems, such as inter-Mennonite strife, which had plagued the Mennonite churches in Russia, were also transported to the new homeland. While some controversies such as the land question were not relevant in America, others were substituted for good measure. Regier, feeling the tensions in his congregation and among other Mennonite Brethren, invited leaders to a meeting at his home, beginning on September 28, 1878. Items discussed in-

cluded the question of forming a conference, communion, marriage, baptism, the "holy kiss," the method of greeting, as well as whether or not church members should hold public office. On many of the issues no true consensus was reached.

In 1882 Peter's brother, Elder Johann J. Regier, was asked to accept the leadership of the Henderson congregation; Peter continued to work as an active teacher.<sup>6</sup> When Elder Regier went on an extended trip to Russia in 1895-1896, Peter Regier, Johann Enns and others in the congregation played a more active role in the leadership.

In 1897 the Peter Regiers moved, apparently at the request of many who felt they needed the pastoral help, to North Enid, Oklahoma. There he worked actively in the church, but also took the time, using information collected from people such as Franz Isaac, to publish a brief history of the Mennonite Brethren church.<sup>7</sup> While considered to be of limited scope, emphasizing mainly the Molotschna aspects of the history, it was nevertheless thought to be an impartial portrayal of the struggle and events, and of the development of the new movement.<sup>8</sup> In North Enid he was ordained as Elder in 1902.

At the news of the death of his brother Johann, he travelled back to Henderson. Though delayed by floods, and only arriving after the service had already started, he delivered the funeral oration, using Revelation 7:9-17 as text.<sup>9</sup> Because of Johann's untimely death, Peter replaced him on an assignment of itinerant ministry soon after the funeral; many churches were visited, including a circuit totalling 6000 miles of travel.<sup>10</sup>

Peter had no sooner reached home, when he received news of the death of another brother, Kornelius, also of Henderson, on September 30, 1902. He again set off to participate in the funeral, but this time it was not to be.<sup>11</sup> On October 2, the train he was riding on gave a sudden lurch, he fell and fractured his leg. He was taken off the train and admitted to hospital in McCool, Nebraska, where he stayed for about six weeks. He received much support and prayer, but preferred the company of his family, so he was transferred to the home of his son Johann, in Henderson. He still longed for home, so 15 weeks after his injury, with the leg still not healed, he was transported back to North Enid, Oklahoma.

Added to the non-union of his broken leg was a fibroid tumour which appeared to be spreading. On November 16, 1903, he had very severe pain which may have been caused by kidney stones. Eventually these conditions were complicated by paraplegia, paralysis of the lower body, which could have been the result of the

spreading fibroid tumour. His last days are recorded as, “. . . altogether the last 22½ months of his life were filled with pain. He had much sorrow and suffering, but he always had a firm faith and trust in his maker.”<sup>12</sup> Peter Regier, the zealous gospel preacher and disturber, met his Maker on July 14, 1904. A funeral service was held in North Enid, Elder Abraham Schellenberg delivering the funeral oration.<sup>13</sup>

It had been the wish of Peter to be buried in Nebraska, so his wife, together with daughter Katharina, and sons Kornelius and Johann, accompanied the body to Henderson, where he was interred on July 20, 1904. Despite the fact that it was in the middle of harvest time, the Henderson church was filled almost to the rafters by worshippers paying their last respects at the second funeral service of this “brave soldier from our midst.”<sup>14</sup>

Peter's wife, Katharina, returned to North Enid where she lived as a widow for 17 years. In March, 1922, she visited her children, the Isaak Goertzens of Henderson, Nebraska.<sup>15</sup> While there she became ill, and several weeks later died on April 14, 1922, at the age of 76 years. She and Peter had shared joys and sorrows for 36 years; they had a total of 12 children. She was survived by five sons and one daughter.

JAKOB L. LOEWEN  
The Mobile Pioneer  
(1842-1931)

Jakob L. Loewen was born August 23, 1842 to Jakob and Maria Loewen. The village of his birth is not known,<sup>1</sup> but in 1848 the Jakob Loewens moved to Hierschau as original settlers. While his father was busy being a successful farmer, even taking part in a milk production experiment in the Molotschna in 1851,<sup>2</sup> young Jakob enjoyed his youth, and received his primary education in Hierschau.

The Loewen family, with at least seven children, then moved to the Crimea in 1862, settling, along with a number of other Hierschau families, in the little village of Bruderfeld. Jakob, by that time aged 24 years, married Helena Unruh on October 28, 1866. This marriage was blessed by a total of 13 children, of whom three died at a young age.

In 1874, with four children ranging in age from seven years to one month, Jakob and Helena emigrated to the United States. They crossed the ocean on the S.S. Silesia, Hamburg to New York, arriving on July 8.<sup>3</sup> On the same ship were parents Jakob Loewens with family, brothers Dietrich and Isaak with their wives and children, as well as the Peter Engbrecht family. In all, there were 28 adults and children on the vessel who, via Bruderfeld, had their roots in Hierschau. Along with the rest of the group, the young Jakob Loewen family settled on the wide prairie of Turner County, South Dakota, near Parker. At first it must have been bleak, and certainly difficult. It was said that "... he lived through the difficulties of a new settlement."

In 1877 Jakob and his wife Helena attended evangelistic meetings in the area, were convicted of their sinful state, and were converted. In May, 1879, they were baptized by Elder Heinrich Adrian and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church.

In 1902 the Jakob Loewens moved to Bruderfeld, Saskatchewan, which was situated near Waldheim. Unfortunately Helena found the cold climate intolerable, having respiratory difficulty, so after almost six years in Canada they moved back to a warmer area. They chose to stay in Enid, Oklahoma, because some of their children lived there, then finally bought a house and established a home in Buhler, Kansas. Because Tabor College was built in Hillsboro, however, a number of Loewen relatives had moved there. The Loewens, after they found a buyer for their house, followed the stream in 1909. In Hillsboro they intended to have

their permanent home.

Unfortunately the move south from Saskatchewan had not alleviated Helena Loewen's respiratory symptoms. In the autumn of 1909 her distress increased, and despite the best medical care she continued to deteriorate. Finally on March 22, 1910, she died, likely of heart failure.<sup>4</sup>

Jakob did not take long to find a new helpmate, marrying the widow of Kornelius Duerksen on August 18, 1910. The couple continued to live in Hillsboro, and for the next 20 years seem to have had a reasonably comfortable existence. Finally in the winter of 1930 Jakob was afflicted by symptoms similar to those of his deceased wife; he became short of breath. This settled down, but when kidney failure was added to the infirmities the following winter, it was too much. He died on February 2, 1931 at the age of 88 years. He was survived by his wife, ten children, 52 grandchildren and 53 great grandchildren. At the farewell to his family he gave a clear testimony that he was at peace with God and his fellow man, and longed to go home to be with the Lord.

Thus was laid to rest a restless, mobile pioneer. While Jakob L. Loewen did not appear to be a leader himself, he had participated in many ventures which certainly required a dauntless spirit and much hard work.



## BOOK 2. THE GOLDEN AGE

After the migration of the 1870s, things seemed to settle down. Mechanisms to take care of excess population had been worked out. Arrangements had been made to satisfy recent government demands. A highly developed system of agriculture made certain that the farmer was adequately rewarded for the sweat of his brow. Mennonites were increasingly involved in manufacturing and in the professions, widening the economic base, but also increasing the complexity and sophistication of Mennonite society. Hierschau, while remaining distinctly agricultural, participated heart and soul in this Golden Age of the Mennonite Commonwealth.

We will pause in our chronological account of Hierschau history to look at various aspects of village life in greater detail. The people, their joys and sorrows, strengths and foibles, are of course the most important. A close second, particularly in Hierschau, was the *Wirtschaft*, the building block of Russian Mennonite society. Though there was no church building in Hierschau, its citizens certainly took their spiritual life seriously. Transportation and communications are seldom included in discussions of Mennonite history, although many aspects of life were affected or even controlled by these factors. Initially an afterthought, the village school became an influential element in Mennonite society, and the school in Hierschau was no exception. Hierschau had its own political structure which, by and large, seemed to adequately care for the needs of its citizens. Around the turn of the century, however, there seemed to be increasing awareness of the fact that, separated from the world or not, Mennonite society, carrying Hierschau with it, was being pulled into the mainstream of Russian life.





## VI THE PEOPLE

After the massive migrations of the 1870s, the population of Hierschau stabilized, with no major group or blocks of families leaving. With typically large Mennonite families, there was, of course, a steady trickle of people to the daughter colonies, but there was also considerable moving back and forth between the various Molotschna villages. The total number of households in Hierschau remained static at 62. In 1915 there were 30 *Vollwirtschaften*, with 64.4 dessiatines land each, 24 *Kleinwirtschaften* with 14.8 dessiatines, the other eight establishments presumably having no associated land. A total Mennonite population of 427 occupied 2309 dessiatines of land.<sup>1</sup>

The relative stability of the population in Hierschau allowed for development of a specific and unique character in the village. Heinrich Thiessen described the people as "on the average very moral, energetic and hard working."<sup>2</sup> They viewed the past with a certain degree of reverence; in 1901 four of the original founding pioneers still lived in Hierschau and appeared to be celebrated members of the community.<sup>3</sup> The leaders of the village continued to accept the historic challenge thrust upon their shoulders by Cornies when he named the settlement *Hier schau*.<sup>4</sup> This found expression particularly in agricultural development, where the newest innovations and best equipment were necessary for the operation of the *Wirtschaft*.

Village pride developed easily in people with a common experience and common objectives. This pride, together with a sense of humour and an element of competition, gave rise to village nicknames — some complimentary, most definitely not.<sup>5</sup> All were of course in Low German, that being the operational language in the villages. Hierschangers were *Eemskjeklaau* or *Eemskjekjniēpa* (ant pincers). Their Waldheim neighbours were *Wauldheena* (forest hens), those from Landskrone *Laundheena* (prairie chickens)<sup>6</sup> while the Rueckenau villagers were *Pogge* (frogs).<sup>7</sup>

The young people of the villages tended to form very cohesive units. While all certainly worked hard, there was time left for social activities. In summertime they played games, often a modified form of cricket, usually on somebody's yard.<sup>8</sup> Picnics were held on a field at the Waldheim end of the village near the Benjamin Duerksen house.<sup>9</sup> In wintertime there was little in the way of outdoor sports, but 12 to 15 young people might gather to sing and play guitar or balalaika. After the confinement of winter, in late April or early May, the young men of the village would

display the horses they had raised and trained. On a designated day, after supper, all would ride along the street with their steeds, proud as could be. Then they would form a straight line across the street on one end of the village and race to the other end to see whose horse was the fastest.<sup>10</sup> Although there was undoubtedly considerable visiting between the villages, relationships were not always amicable. The Hierschau and Landskrone youth would get together for games or picnics, but there was not much love lost between Hierschau and Waldheim.<sup>11</sup> The young men particularly resented "foreigners" visiting the young ladies of their own village.

Some youth activities were spontaneous, others more planned and organized. Despite the fact that there was no church in Hierschau, a junior and a senior choir were organized. They practiced once a week, and sang at special occasions. At one funeral it was even reported in the press that "the Hierschau choir sang quite well."<sup>12</sup> Repertoire included folk songs as well as hymns. Choirs usually sang unaccompanied, although, of course, a tuning fork set the original pitch.<sup>13</sup> Musical notation was by *Ziffern* (a numerical system of designating notes), the typical method used by Mennonites in Russia at that time. Some of the directors of the senior choir were Kornelius Peters, Jakob Friesen and later Kornelius Boschmann. Hermann Goertzen and David Duerksen directed the junior choir.<sup>14</sup> The choir helped carry on the musical tradition in the village, but also served to provide social activities in which the youth of the village could participate. A group picture taken of the senior choir shortly before 1926 gives a fairly complete idea of who was in that age group in Hierschau at the time.<sup>15</sup>

Life in the villages was set in traditions which slowly evolved as the Mennonites, predominantly farmers, developed methods and institutions to suit their life style and philosophy of existence. Gertrude Willms is an example of someone who was born in Hierschau, lived her entire life and died in Hierschau (see capsule biography). Her story briefly illustrates a number of the traditions, some commendable, for example the help the community gave the family at funerals, others harshly pragmatic, such as assigning the children to various families after the death of a parent.

One gets the impression that generally life in Hierschau was quite pleasant. The village was prosperous, although not all may have benefited equally from this prosperity. And yet life was serious. Life expectancy was not quite what it is today, so the fear of having to meet one's maker at any time was likely a large element in the thinking of the people. A news report from Hierschau



Hierschau senior choir shortly before 1926, Jakob Friesen the conductor

Front row l. to r.:

Maria Neufeld, Maria Willms, Jakob Friesen (conductor), Katharina Stobbe, Maria Duerksen, Anna Dyck.

Second row:

Alice Zehrt, Gertrude Willms, Margaretha Fast, Elisabeth Wiebe, Susanna Zehrt, Maria Stobbe, Sara Duerksen.

Third row:

Pauline (Dyck), Aganetha Siemens, Susanna Wiebe, Lydia Wallmann, unknown, Katharina Duerksen, Susanna Kroecker.

Fourth row:

Peter Siemens, Johann Willms, unknown, Franz Willms, Jakob Duerksen, Johann Dyck, David Duerksen, Gerhard Wiebe, Heinrich Thiessen.

in 1913 lists five deaths over a period of few weeks,<sup>16</sup> with two more occurring several months later. A number of elderly people died of unknown causes, 18 year old Anna Siemens succumbed to tuberculosis, and two month old Aganetha Stobbe also died of an unknown disease. The writer of the report comments that "The Lord spoke earnestly in Hierschau." Certainly seven deaths in a small village in four months would tend to make one think about eternal values.

Routine village life, while happy and satisfying, is often not documented in the records of the time. The unusual or bizarre is both remembered and recorded. A number of such episodes in Hierschau village life, while not illustrating the humdrum average day to day activities, might still be of interest.

\* \* \*

Widow Heinrich Hoemsen, aged 65, and her 14 year old Russian servant girl, lived in the last house in a *Kleinwirtschaft* on the east end of Hierschau. On the morning of January 22, 1886 at about 10 o'clock, the neighbour's daughter went there to deliver a note, but found the front door to be locked. Since no one opened the door she went to a window to look in. It was fairly cold (about -16°R), so the windows were frosted up, yet through a small clear area she saw a human body lying in a pool of blood. Almost speechless with fright, she ran back and told her parents what she had seen.

After a number of neighbours were called together, a window was removed and they entered the house. They had forgotten to check the back door, and later found it to be unlocked. In the *Grosse Stube* (parlour) they saw the servant girl with her throat cut, lying in blood. In the corner of the room they saw the widow sitting in bed, head slumped forward. When they lifted her head they saw that her throat had also been cut.

A trunk had been broken into, linen was strewn on the floor, and next to the murdered girl lay a thick stick on which there was hair and blood. Further investigation showed that the murderers had come through the machine shed into the barn, and through a hole in the gable into the house. The club beside the girl, and a stick which was found outside by the shed, were the only objects left by the murderers.

When the father of the Russian girl was brought from the village of Petropalowka, however, and the magistrate asked him if he was suspicious of anyone, he named a man Andraei Bobier from the village of Kasankowat (17 werst from Hierschau). This man had been with him on one occasion when he had visited his daughter at Widow Hoemsen's, at which time his daughter had speculated that her employer must be very rich. Bobier and his two sons, aged 17 and 16, were arrested. A chisel of Bobier's exactly fitted the impressions on the trunk. They also found, on careful examination, that there was still blood on Bobier's coat which had not been completely washed off. At the hearing Bobier, together with his sons, denied everything, and said that they had been at home.

After a witness testified that she had previously seen the men at the widow's home, and after Bobier's wife revealed what she knew, Bobier and his sons confessed to the murders. After the widow and her servant girl had been murdered they had broken into the trunk . . but had found only five rubles. They took the money, eight kerchiefs and two aprons.

The murderers, under guard, were taken to Gross Tokmak. The body of Widow Hoemsen was laid to rest on January 27, 1886.<sup>17</sup>

\* \* \*

Heinrich J. Thiessen, in a letter to the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, warned housewives to be careful when they baked or cooked fruit. Occasionally a jar filled with cherries might explode if the stove was too hot. This usually was of no consequence, except that the jar and its contents were "kaput." But it had recently been demonstrated in Hierschau that this dangerous explosion could have serious consequences. Mrs. Kornelius Stobbe was busy cooking cherries, and when the cherries were done she stepped in front of the oven opening to remove the jars from the oven. While she was doing that, a jar exploded, and Mrs. Stobbe was scalded by the hot cherries. Her face was so badly cut by the flying glass that they were seriously worried about her eyesight. On June 21, 1903, she was taken to the hospital at Muntau, where she was treated by Dr. Tavonius.<sup>18</sup>

\* \* \*

During the time when many of the young men of Hierschau were away serving in the *Forstei*, girls often had to do much of the farm work. So it was that Helena and Martha (their names have been changed to protect their identity) were busy working one cool rainy morning, Helena building fires in the stoves with straw, and Martha working in the barn. Suddenly Martha ran in from the barn to get her mother, and as soon as she could, Helena also followed. On the manure cart Martha had found a newborn infant. Straw had been put into the cart, then the baby, carefully wrapped in what was likely part of a woman's shirt (which was full of lice), was covered over with straw. Since even the afterbirth was present it was assumed that the baby had just recently been born. The infant started to cry, possibly because it was cold outside, but the family was afraid to touch or move anything.

The village *Schulze* and his assistant were sent for, and they also advised that nothing be touched. Police and other officials finally arrived, reviewed the situation, and then allowed the cart to be pushed into the barn, where it was a bit warmer. Tracks were found leading from the cart to the back door of the barn, through the garden, then towards neighbouring Waldheim, where they were lost on the street. Helena and Martha wondered about keep-

ing the baby, but their mother felt it was best not to. The Abram Siemens of Hierschau took the infant boy into their home and raised him.

After this event, ministers kept dropping in at the home of Helena and Martha to talk to their mother. The girls had not noticed at the time, but later remembered that there was whispering whenever they arrived at meetings or gatherings. Finally Helena and Martha were confronted. It was rumoured in the village that the baby found in the manure cart was actually Martha's! The ministers came to obtain a confession from Martha, and also demanded that Helena tell them the identity of the father. Because the two girls shared a room, presumably Helena would know who Martha's boyfriend was. The ministers kept coming back, demanding a confession, despite repeated declaration of innocence by both girls. Even their own uncle came to ask, and finally threatened that they might have to be coaxed with a milk stick, if Martha did not own up to her deed. There were apparently a number of *Schulzenbott* meetings to discuss the situation.

Finally, it was suggested that Martha be examined by a midwife in Waldheim, which she consented to. She was taken to Waldheim and duly examined by a German midwife, and the report was delivered to the *Schulzenbott*. The report was not accepted because it was written in pencil.

Since the documentation of the midwife's findings was not accepted, Martha was asked if she would submit to another examination. She again consented. Martha, her mother, the village *Schulze* and his assistant went to Halbstadt to see Dr. Tavonius. The two officials first talked to Dr. Tavonius, explaining the problem. Then the doctor, in the presence of the two officials, did the examination. He concluded that Martha could not have had previous sexual relations. Then Dr. Tavonius exploded. He pounded the table hard enough to rattle all the medicine bottles that stood on it. Red with anger he severely castigated the officials for falsely accusing the girl and giving the poor mother and her children such a difficult time. He wrote out his report in German and in Russian — using pen and ink. He felt that there had been a severe insult to the honour of a girl and her family, and insisted that his report be made public in Hierschau, and that the actual document be read by all members of the *Schulzenbott*.

The report was indeed taken back to Hierschau, a *Schulzenbott* meeting was called, and the note, passed from hand to hand, was read by all those present. The family had been advised that there were sufficient grounds to take legal action, but decided against



The irresistible crow's nest



this extreme measure. The mother felt that "The sun is so clear, nature is so nice, we will forgive." Apologies were made and accepted.

The young infant boy, who had been taken into the home of the Abram Siemens, was named Alfred. Perhaps the final tragedy of the episode is that he later became a communist, and eventually evicted his aged, half blind foster parents from their own home.<sup>19</sup>

\* \* \*

Boys will be boys, and those of Hierschau were no exception. Birds and their eggs have a certain unexplainable attraction to young fellows. The boys of the village used to watch where the birds would land in the trees, then climb up to those branches and put sticky glue on the spot. Later, when the bird came back to its usual roosting area, its feet would stick to the branch, and it was easily captured.

The tall poplar trees along the street, particularly those at the Waldheim end of the village, were often filled with crows and their nests. These seemed to have a particularly magnetic attraction to the boys of Hierschau. Some of these crow's nests were high up and hard to reach. One day a Russian boy, more daring than the others, was trying to get eggs from a nest which was especially high. Unfortunately he slipped and fell, suffering open fractures of both arms as well as internal injuries. He was first taken into a neighbouring house, then to the hospital at Waldheim, where he died, likely from his internal injuries.<sup>20</sup>

\* \* \*

### Village Maps and Families

On a tour through Hierschau in October, 1901, Heinrich Thiessen drew attention to the farms which were still occupied by the same owners as those of 1874.<sup>21</sup> Of the 30 *Vollwirtschaften* there were 13, that is almost half, which were still under the same management after 27 years. A few of these, although nominally owned by the elderly parents, were actually operated by their children. On a similar visit up and down the well-treed street of Hierschau in 1904, Thiessen enumerated the other *Wirtschaft* owners as well.<sup>22</sup> In these intervening three years a number of farmers had died and their widows or sons were listed as owners. A map, dating from about 1920, shows additional changes in ownership of the *Wirtschaften*, although a surprising number were retained by the same families.<sup>23</sup>



ACCORDING TO H.J. THIESSEN

HH/DH



**WINDMILL**  
**Jakob Thiesen**

UETJACHT

Begim - Tschokrak River

WALDHEIM

LANDSKRONE

ALSO:  
Kornelius Janzen

Gerhard Warkentin
Johann Loewen
Heinrich Derksen

30	Johann Willms
29	Gerhard Wiebe
28	Johann Siemens
27	Johann Siemens
26	Jakob Duerksen
25	J. Stobbe and J. Hildebrandt
24	Kornelius Goertzen
23	Peter Toews

SCHOOL

22	Michael Duerksen
21	Widow Peter Boldt
20	Bernhard Bergen
19	Peter Friesen
18	Franz Dyck
17	Johann Fast
16	Kornelius Plett

LANDSKRONE END  
ALSO:  
Heinrich Sukkau  
Heinrich Poettger  
Abram Dueck

A common pattern in Hierschau was to live a full and active life on a *Vollwirtschaft*, until the declining years, when it was sold to buy a *Kleinwirtschaft*. This avoided the difficulties, cares and worries of running a large establishment.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, some retirees found that they still had to work hard to make ends meet. Very occasionally younger people, occupying *Kleinwirtschaften*, eventually bought and moved into *Vollwirtschaften*. Gerhard Plett and Heinrich Sukkau were examples of this.

A simple review of maps of the time gives some idea of village life. The Peter Boldt family, for example, were original settlers in Hierschau, and owned *Wirtschaft* No. 21. Their children, however, tended to scatter to the various daughter colonies when it was time to establish households. Julius Plett, also an original settler, owned *Wirtschaft* No. 12. The Plett family, in contrast, tended to stay in Hierschau, with the 1920 map showing a total of seven *Wirtschaften* owned by the Pletts and their in-laws. A Plett family cousin picture demonstrates quite graphically that this clan was in no danger of dying out.

The exact site and ownership of the *Vollwirtschaften* is relatively easy to plot, but the *Kleinwirtschaften* on either end of the village are more difficult to document. There were supposed to be 15 at each end of the village, although most people remember only about ten. A number of them seemed to have been used as gardens. Heinrich Thiessen admitted that he did not know much about the owners of the *Kleinwirtschaften*, and simply lists some of them. Ownership of these establishments changed much more frequently than did that of the *Vollwirtschaften*.

Besides retirees, people who moved in from other villages tended to occupy this area. Service people, and non-Mennonite villagers also lived in *Kleinwirtschaften*. The village policeman, usually a retired Russian army officer, had a house on the Landskrone end of Hierschau.<sup>25</sup> A Jewish shoemaker lived on the Waldheim end of the village, although the exact *Kleinwirtschaft* is not known.<sup>26</sup> The cowherds were sometimes Mennonites, sometimes not, but also lived in a *Kleinwirtschaft*. The Zehrt family, living at the Landskrone end of the village, carried out this work for some time, about 1915-1920.<sup>27</sup> Heinrich Derksen (*Schneider Derksa*) was a tailor who lived in a *Kleinwirtschaft*.<sup>28</sup> *Piepkje Jaunza* (Low German: whistling Janzen) was the night watchman, whose steady whistling assured the villagers that all was well.<sup>29</sup> Johann Hildebrandt ran a dry goods store from his *Kleinwirtschaft* on the corner of the main street and the *Uetjacht*. The owner of the windmill, for a time Jakob Thiessen, a nephew of Heinrich J. Thiessen, lived close to the mill along the *Uetjacht*.<sup>30</sup>

# HIERSCHAU ABOUT 1920 HH/DH



○ WINDMILL  
Jakob Thiesen

UETJACHT

	Jewish Shoemaker
	Benjamin Duerksen
	Neudorf
	Abram Siemens
	Peter Sperling

↑ WALDHEIM

	Peter Warkentin
	Gerhard Warkentin
	Kornelius Boschmann
	Heinrich Derksen

David Hildebrandt	1
Julius Plett	2
Kornelius Stobbe	3
Jakob Stobbe	4
Peter Neufeld	5
Jakob Willms	6
Bernhard Plett	7
Jakob Stobbe	8
Johann Siemens	
Jakob Hildebrandt	9
Heinrich Bergen	10
Isaak Janzen	11
Gerhard Plett	12
Kornelius Siemens	13
Johann Stobbe	14
Heinrich Kroeker	15

Begin - Tschokrak River

30	Johann Willms
29	Gerhard Wiebe
28	Peter Wolf
27	Peter Dyck
26	Jakob Duerksen
25	Franz Neufeld
24	Peter Goertzen
23	Johann Thiesen

SCHOOL

22	Heinrich Sukkau
21	Kornelius Peters
20	Bernhard Bergen
19	Gerhard Neufeld
18	Widow Dyck
17	Johann Fast
16	Kornelius Plett

↓ LANDSKRONE

Johann Hildebrandt
Jakob Janzen
Jakob Luetke
Boese
Wallmann
Johann Friesen

Village Policeman
Abram Huebner
Luetke Sisters
Garden
Peter Wedel



Plett family cousins, photographed in Landskrone in 1926, shortly before the Willms family emigrated. All except Susanna and Katharina Heidebrecht lived in Hierschau.

Front row l. to r.:

Gertrude Plett, Katharina Willms, Aganetha (Nettie) Willms, Aganetha Plett.

Second row:

Katharina Plett, Elisabeth Braun, Maria Plett, Maria Plett, Maria Braun, Gertrude Plett

Third row:

Anna Plett, Susanna Heidebrecht, Enelse Plett, Katharina Heidebrecht, Gertrude Willms

Fourth row:

Kornelius Plett, Abraham Plett, Johann Willms, Heinrich Plett, Bernard Plett, Gerhard Willms.

While Hierschau had a definite collective spirit and pride, there appeared to be some citizens who were more equal than others in the social structure. In the earlier years it is reported that the Wall family was poor and landless, and did not often go into the village, where the nice houses were, because they did not belong there.<sup>31</sup> This attitude is confirmed by later residents; it was felt that there definitely was some discrimination between the *Vollwirten* and the landless.<sup>32</sup> Girls did not marry below their social status; it was more or less equal with equal.<sup>33</sup> There was, in a way, a sort of caste or class system.

Despite these inequities, the people of Hierschau by and large

were proud of their village. They took the challenge of being a model village seriously. The Hierschau *Eemskjekjniepa* felt that they had much to be thankful for, and proud of.

GERTRUDE WILLMS  
Daughter of a Pioneer  
1869-1924

Gertrude Willms was born in Hierschau on April 5, 1869. She was the thirteenth child of Julius Plett, who was one of the original settlers of Hierschau. The first mother of the family died in 1858, and Julius married again that same year, bringing Elisabeth Voth, from Friedensdorf, to be the mother of the young family. This new marriage was blessed by eight children, the second last of which was Gertrude.<sup>1</sup>

Little specific detail is known about the childhood and youth of Gertrude. Her father Julius, being a pioneer farmer, was likely a hard worker. By the time she was born, he was 52 years of age, so that one could anticipate a generation gap. The first ten children of the family were boys, so it is probable that the home was quite male oriented, although a number of them likely left home before Gertrude was born. Her most immediate siblings were Elisabeth (four years older), Maria (two years older), and Isaak (two years younger), so she had playmates in the family as well as in the neighbourhood. She grew up with *Wirtschaft* No. 12, north side of the street, as her home.

The Hierschau school had been built in 1852, and primary education was compulsory, so Gertrude undoubtedly attended *Dorfschule* (village school) from age seven to thirteen (1876-82). She sang in the choir, likely having an alto voice, since she was sometimes asked to help out in the tenor section when not enough men were available. Love of singing continued into her adult life; her family remembers that she often sang while she worked.<sup>2</sup> She learned to spin, knit and crochet as a girl, something she found useful in later years.

As a young woman, Gertrude seemed to be aware of a widower Braun, who lived in Hierschau, with five children. She had the inner conviction that she was, in some way, responsible for these children. Even so, on one occasion when Johann Braun came walking down the street and turned onto their yard, she ran and hid in the garden to avoid seeing him. Eventually the inner conviction won out, and on February 18, 1892, the 22 year old Gertrude married Johann Braun, then aged 39. His five children were Helena (Dyck), Johann, Anna (Herfort), Susanna (Peters) and Katharina (Reimer). It is not certain where Braun had lived in Hierschau, nor where the new couple settled after their marriage. It is quite probable that they did not own a *Wirtschaft*, since the Braun children

later did not seem to inherit any substantial money or property. The Brauns may have lived in a *Kleinwirtschaft* at the Waldheim end of the village. Four children were born into the newly established family:

Franz	1894 (died as an infant)
Heinrich	October 17, 1895
Elisabeth (Dueck)	March 14, 1897
Maria (Wall)	September 1, 1898

After a three day illness, Johann Braun died of typhus on June 23, 1899, leaving the 30 year old widow with eight children. At the time Mennonite society was pragmatic, if not sensitive, so the five original Braun children were distributed to foster homes by their *Vormuende* (representatives of the children appointed by the village administration). There they were destined to stay, the foster parents even having to provide dowry when the children married.

One of Gertrude's older brothers, Gerhard, had married Katharina Willms of Nikolaidorf in 1890. It is quite possible that through this family tie Gertrude became acquainted with Katharina's older brother, Johann. Eventually Gertrude was wooed by two men, both named Willms, one of whom was Johann. She would have to choose between them. Being a devout woman she prayed about this decision. Some time later she had a dream in which she and her children were in a burning building; both of the Willms men were standing outside. Johann braved the flames to save her and her family. Gertrude considered this to be a divine revelation, and chose Johann. They were married on April 27, 1900, and settled in Hierschau. Quite possibly Johann, being 35 years of age, already had substantial financial resources. It is likely that the newly married couple purchased their *Wirtschaft*, No. 30, on the south side of the village street, around the time of their marriage. Renovations must have begun soon thereafter, since by 1904 the Willms roof had been covered with new cement tiles "which are very colourful and beautiful and remind one of a checker-board."<sup>3</sup> The Willms *Wirtschaft* was always meticulously cared for, and usually had the most up-to-date equipment, a tribute to both Johann and Gertrude Willms. Born into this family were:

Gertrude	May 30, 1901 Died June 6, 1901
Gerhard	May 16, 1903
Gertrude (Baerg)	May 10, 1905

Johann	October 6, 1907
Katharina (Huebert)	September 12, 1909
Aganetha (Toews)	July 18, 1911

Johann Willms was a tall kind man, good to his children and apparently loving to his wife. When he bought her gifts they were always of the finest quality, for example, cloth for her clothes.<sup>4</sup> This admiration was mutual, as demonstrated by his wife's concern for his health, particularly in the later years. While her husband saw to the management of the farm and various other business interests, Gertrude managed the house and gardens, trained the daughters, and fulfilled her community obligations. The new Daimler motor ordered from Germany to power the threshing machine was matched by the equally new iron stove also ordered from Germany for the kitchen. The Willms family was prosperous and while both the parents and the children worked hard, there were household and farm servants to help, particularly in the busy summer season.

Gerturde had dark hair, was about five foot four or five inches tall, and always well dressed. She loved flowers, having a large flower garden and many house plants. She had a wooden "tree" in the entrance way to the house, with many platforms, on which to place the house plants. She did a lot of needle work, knitting and crocheting. Her own clothes were often sewn by a seamstress, Mrs. Johann Thiessen, also of Hierschau, but in later more difficult times, she would spin and knit a lot of material for herself. A young lad from the village described her as "a very regal, compassionate lady who commanded respect from everyone who knew her."<sup>5</sup> She always knew when someone in the village was in need, and often was there to help. The children remember frequent journeys of mercy to deliver chicken noodle soup or *Fruchtmooss* (Low German: fruit soup) to the homes of sick people. The accompanying "*Dann flitz mau, daut de Sup nich aufkjeelt*" (Low German: Make it fast, so the soup won't cool off) stimulated rapid delivery of the steaming containers. An elderly lady, Mrs. Buller, of Waldheim, would come in spring to ask for seeds for her garden, then reappear in autumn to be given vegetables because her garden had not been productive. Even Russian women from the nearby villages would come to ask for help. Among them Gertrude was known as "*Mamuschka*." (Russian: little mother)

Her relationship to God seemed to be an important element in Gertrude's life. She often referred to her prayer life, and daily retired to the *Grosse Stube* to read the big family Bible. She was a





Johann and Gertrude Willms (1909)

good story teller and often told her children Bible stories; she made a game of it, leaving the children to find the passage the story came from. Even when she was near death, her faith continued; she had trusted God through all the difficult times, so death was not something to be feared, but only a passing over to the other side (*"Es ist kein Sterben, nur ein Uebergehen"*).

While Gertrude was loving, she also believed in discipline, particularly when it came to raising the children. She participated in meting out punishment, even using the *Malkjstock* (Low German:

milk stick) when required, although she most often used persuasion to institute family rules. Strict curfews were applied. Her daughters would go to a wedding reception with strict orders to be home by ten o'clock, with the admonition that after ten she would be on her knees praying for them. This usually brought them home punctually. Once they were safely in the house at that time of night, she would not let them out again, even when the boys knocked on the windows, asking for their return to the party. Like all mothers, Gertrude preferred her children to have their friends over to their own home, rather than running all over the village. To help this program she surprised the family with a croquet set. Many a pleasant Sunday afternoon was spent chasing croquet balls across the yard.

But the good times could not last. Johann Willms was likely not in good health for some time; he seems to have had chronic stomach trouble. He died on April 25, 1914, at the age of 48; he was buried in the Hierschau cemetery south of the village. A memorial stone was erected, at least as high as a man, grey in colour, with enough room left on its surface to later add his wife's date of death. At the age of 45, Gertrude was again a widow, with eight children and a household to look after. While *Vormuende* were again appointed by the village, this time she was able to keep the family together.

With the onset of World War I in 1914, the idyllic village life was soon to come to an end. Gertrude's son Heinrich was of military age, and elected to participate in the *Forstei* and so was away from home for 26 months. The farm and household were managed by Gertrude and her children, initially with the help of hired hands; when unsettled times arrived, the work fell more directly to the family itself. With fewer goods available for purchase, the farmers had to rely increasingly on their own ingenuity. The Willms had sheep, and Gertrude took up spinning and knitting wool to a greater extent. She and her daughter Gertrude were always busy turning out socks, stockings, sweaters and even whole dresses.

During the revolutionary period and the subsequent civil war, there were many times of danger. The Willms yard seemed to be the place where roving bands and columns of troops turned off the street. Gertrude had a way with people, and appeared to have the confidence of all factions. Dashing aircraft pilots of the White Airforce were quartered at the Willms home during the brief time that the pasture north of Hierschau was used as a landing strip. Officers of the Kornilov Division of the White Army also stayed there; every

morning the military band would play religious songs, and before they left the area they called Gertrude into the house to play one last hymn for her.

Since hospitality was available to all, on one occasion Red officers were hiding in the barn when the White Army moved in. The life of a Red Army nurse was saved by the family when they kept her hidden in the basement until an escape route could be found. Even the roving anarchist bands of Makhno displayed some civility. On one occasion about 30 Makhnowze (followers of Makhno) came to the door asking for a meal of cherry *wrenikje* (Low German: dumplings). The counter proposal was that if they would pick the cherries, Gertrude would make the *wrenikje*. They picked two pailfuls, Gertrude and her daughters made the *wrenikje*, and according to reports, a good meal was had by all. On a number of occasions officers or leaders of the Makhno group stayed at the Willms, the foot soldiers simply sleeping in the yard. Each day the family would prepare food, pass out bread, and dip out cups of milk for each of the men. At other times the encounter was not so friendly. One band of Makhnowze who had been plundering and raping in the village stormed onto the yard and demanded entry into the Willms house. Gertrude pled with them through the closed door, and eventually, for some reason, they just left.

Mother Willms appeared to be a bastion of hope and protection for her family, but at times this process was also reversed. Whenever there was danger for Gertrude, the younger children would surround her and scream. Apparently this technique worked on more than one occasion; it must have meant bad press to attack a woman surrounded by her screaming children!

With the hard times during and after the civil war, the family had to scrounge more and more just to keep body and soul together. However, whenever hungry beggars came to the door they were never turned away if the Willms household had anything to share. Because of the scarcity of horses, it was common for farmers to share draft animals to do the land work. The Willms worked together with a Warkentin family. Sometimes the Willms boys found it irritating to team the skinny Warkentin cows with the stronger Willms animals. Mother Willms would admonish them, suggesting that perhaps they themselves did not need the help, but the Warkentins certainly did.

Gertrude Willms had for a number of years suffered from periodic illness. She seemed to have trouble with her weight, and sometimes her face was swollen and inflamed. Poor nutrition, particularly in 1922 and 1923, did not improve the situation. Her

daughter Maria, with husband Aron Wall, came to visit in January, 1922, because of a severe bout of illness. In July, 1924, Gertrude again did not feel well, and the family thought she had influenza. One evening after a light supper of *Malkjmooss* (Low German: milk soup) she tried to get up, but just could not manage, even with help. A stroke had partially crippled her. She was unable to speak, although with her right hand she would point up. This symbolized her anticipated departure, that she was ready to pass over to the other side. Her children gathered around her, crying, and rubbing her feet. Neighbours dropped in throughout the night to offer help and comfort. Gertrude Willms died in the early morning hours of July 18, 1924, at the age of 55 years. When the cowherds came by to collect cattle, the Willms family had forgotten to take them out to the street that morning.

On the following evening, July 19, buttermilk, milk, cream and other baking ingredients were brought to the Willms household. A large tub of dough was mixed the next morning, then distributed to the neighbours to bake the traditional *Zwieback* (double buns) needed for the funeral meal. The funeral was held in the Willms family *Scheune* (machine shed), with Gertrude's brother, *Aeltester* Gerhard Plett, delivering the funeral address. She was buried beside her husband in the Hierschau cemetery on July 20, 1924. The Willms memorial stone was completed by the inscription of Gertrude's date of death.

So was laid to rest the proud daughter of a pioneer. She was proud of her heritage, but had compassion with all those she came in contact, be they relatives, friends, or even strangers off the street.

## VII THE WIRTSCHAFT

The *Wirtschaft* was the basic building block of Russian Mennonite life. True, there was increasing industrial and business development, there were ever more prominent professionals, yet the *Wirtschaft* and its land represented the firm foundation upon which most other features of life depended. In this simple, inevitable scheme, Hierschau represented a perfect example of Russian Mennonite life.

Hierschau was originally planned to have about 60 households, but by the turn of the century this was reduced to somewhat over 50. There were 30 *Vollwirtschaften*, 15 on each side of the street, neatly measured out in rows, and there were at least five *Kleinwirtschaften* on each side of the street on both ends of the village.

A *Vollwirtschaft* consisted of a yard with buildings in the village, the area being one dessiatine and, according to regulation, 30 fathoms wide by 120 fathoms long. This included the house, barn, cattle sheds, threshing area, garden and general yard area<sup>1</sup> Then there was a forest in Hierschau, located in a strip behind the southern row of *Wirtschaften*, which probably took about  $\frac{1}{2}$  dessiatine of each farmer's allotment. A common pasture was situated north of the village and could be reached by the *Uetjacht* on the Landskrone end, where a bridge crossed the Begim-Tschokrak River. This, together with meadowland south of the village, added up to about ten to fifteen dessiatines per farmer. The remaining 45 to 50 dessiatines per *Wirtschaft* were used as agricultural land to grow the various crops, bringing total land allotment to 65 dessiatines.<sup>2</sup>

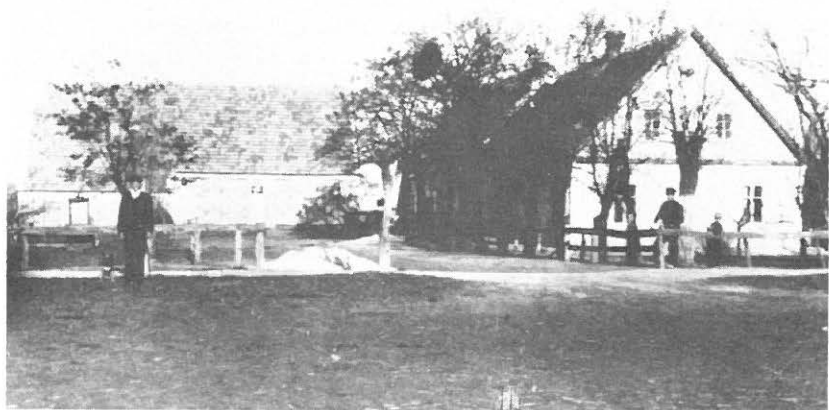
### The Buildings

Most of the Hierschau *Vollwirtschaft* houses and barns were built in 1848 or 1849, according to regulations of the Agricultural Society. General configuration of the main buildings was either one long line of house-barn-shed (17 in Hierschau), or in an "L" shape (13). Houses were originally built with brick walls, quite probably had thatched or wood shingle roofs, although some were being replaced by cement tiles.

The Johann Willms *Wirtschaft*, No. 30, will be portrayed in greater detail. There were individual variations from farm to farm, but this description should give a general idea of an establishment which could be called typical. While no photograph of the Willms buildings has survived, our illustrations show features of a number of neighbouring *Wirtschaften*.



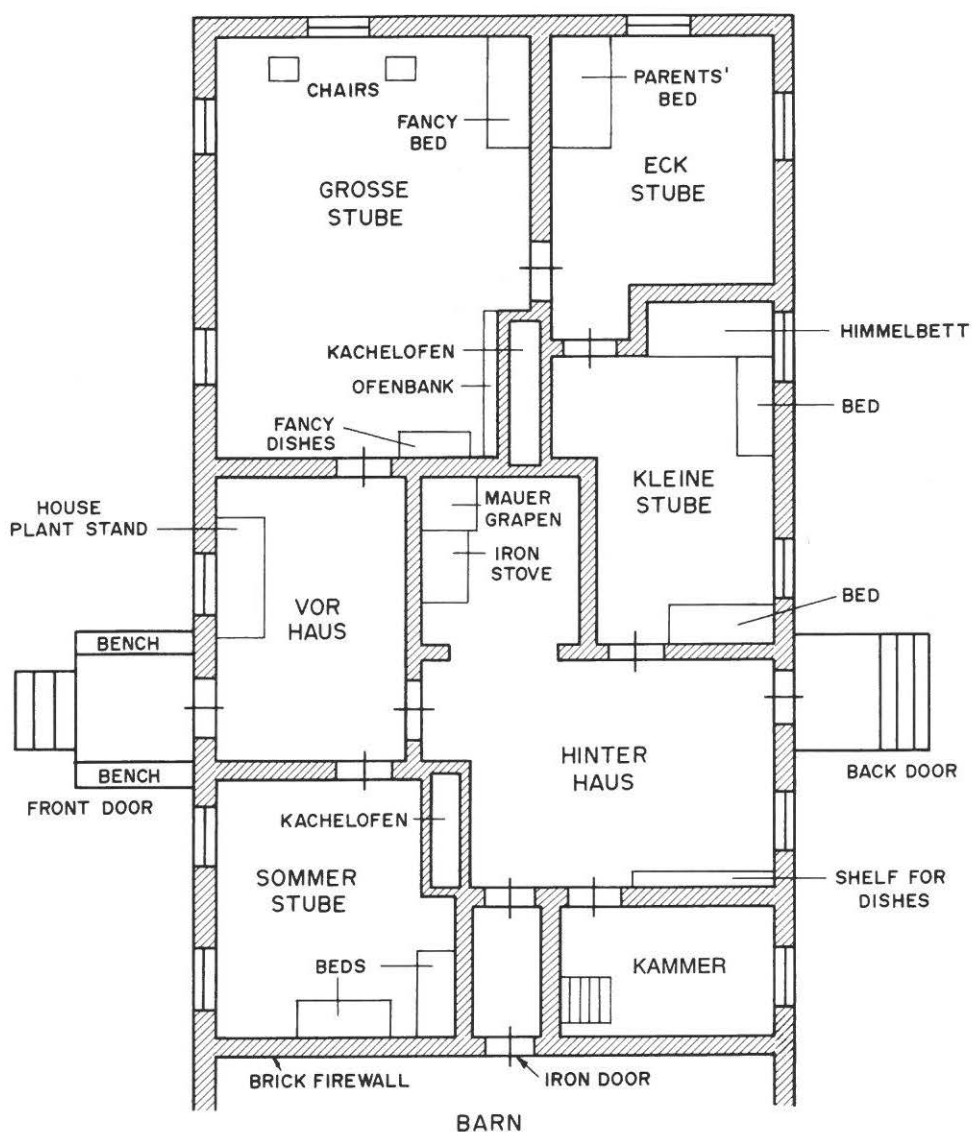
The Home of Peter Neufeld, *Wirtschaft* No. 5



The Home of Jakob Willms, *Wirtschaft* No. 6

The Willms house was built according to the typical Mennonite architecture of the period.<sup>3</sup> It had a single story, with a number of rooms centred around the kitchen with its *Kachelofen* (tile stove).<sup>4</sup> Each room had its function (See Table XIV), which probably varied to some degree from family to family; few rooms were used exclusively for one purpose. The *Kleine Stube* (small room), for example, was the bedroom for the five girls of the family, but also was the room in which they did their homework, and where the whole family ate in winter. There was little provision for individual privacy, even the parents' bedroom serving as sitting room and

FRONT YARD



# THE JOHANN WILLMS HOUSE

GL/HH/DH

(USING THE ILLUSTRATION OF GERHARD LOHRENTZ)

sewing room during the day. Much of the furniture in the house had been built by Johann Willms himself, since he was adept at carpentry, although the iron kitchen stove was imported from Germany.

## TABLE XIV ROOMS IN THE JOHANN WILLMS HOUSE

(see diagram of the house)

### *Grosse Stube* (big room or parlour)

- fancy room for visiting, children not allowed
- fancy bedding displayed
- upholstered chairs, dresser
- glass case for fancy dishes
- table in middle, with lace tablecloth
- *Ofenbank*, bench next to tile stove
- fine wooden floor

### *Eck Stube* (corner room or living room)

- for activities of the day such as sewing, fancy work
- sitting room
- bedroom for the parents

### *Kleine Stube* (small room)

- bedroom for the girls of the family
  - three girls slept in pull-out beds, while the two eldest shared the *Himmelbett*, (four-poster bed) which was built into the wall, with curtains
- homework done in this room, had table
- family ate here in wintertime

### *Hinterhaus* (back or utility room)

- family ate here in spring and fall
- built-in shelves for dishes
- fuel stacked up
- connecting room to the kitchen, pantry, back door and passageway to barn

### *Kammer* (pantry)

- shelves for dishes
- milk separator
- some foods stored here
- stairs down to the basement



*Sommer Stube* (summer room)

- bedroom for the boys of the family, two beds could be pulled out
- used as sitting room during the day
- sometimes married couples would stay in this room

*Kueche* (kitchen)

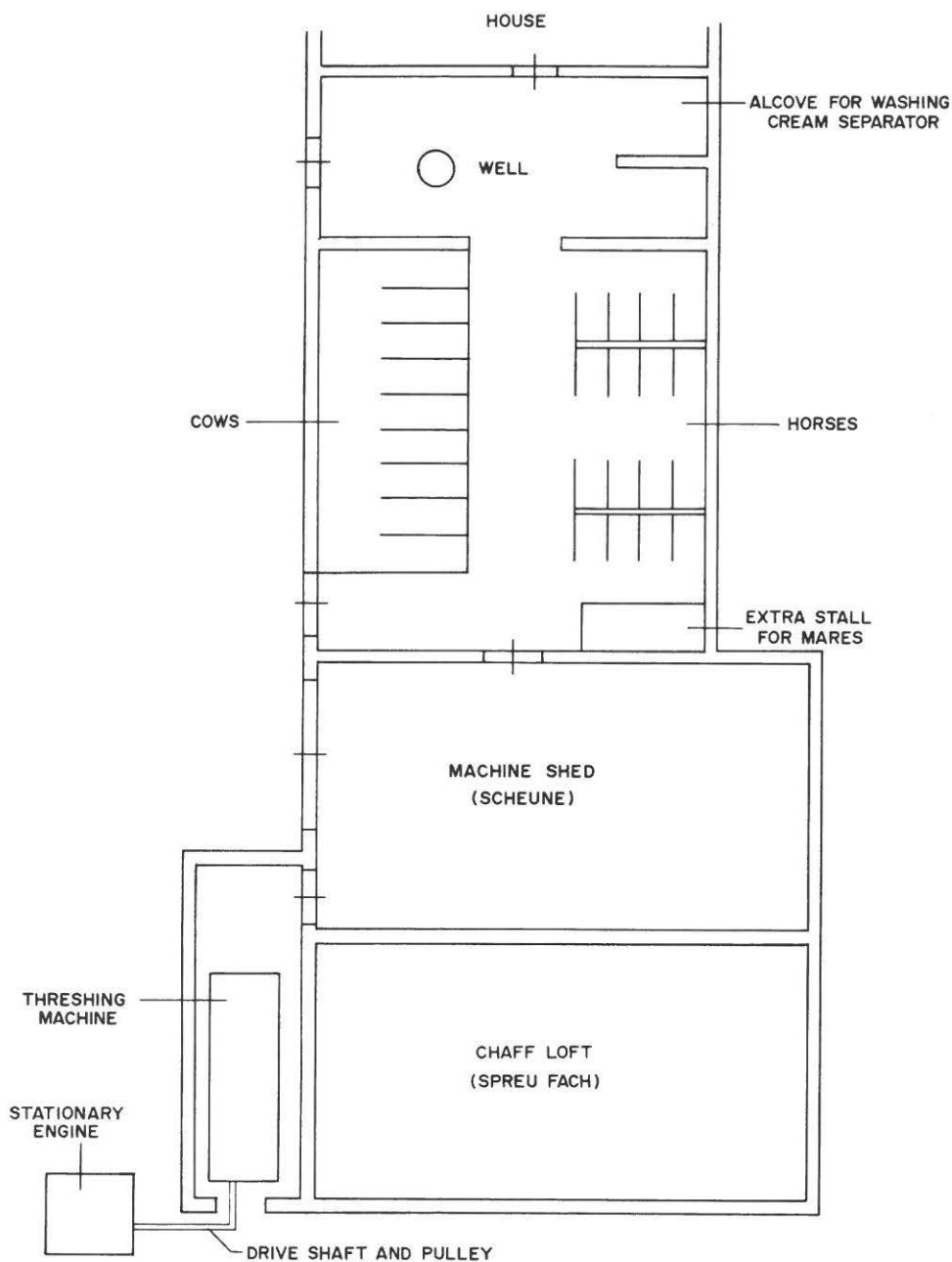
- access to the *Kachelofen* for baking
- had a *Mauergrapen* (large stoneware cooking pot)
- had an iron kitchen stove, imported from Germany

*Vorhaus* (front room or entrance)

- main entrance way
- stand for indoor houseplants
- bench for sitting and visiting
- had tea here in summer with drop-in guests

The outside walls of the house were brick, painted a light blue, likely with white trim. Shortly before 1904 Johann Willms had the roof redone with cement tiles which were very colourful and beautiful, and looked much like a checkerboard.<sup>5</sup> Immediately behind the house, and connected to it by a short hall area, was the barn. A brick wall with an iron door separated the two, presumably to act as a fire break. In the hall area was a well, and an alcove for washing milk separators and other equipment. The barn itself had stalls for cattle on one side and horses on the other. Behind the barn was the *Scheune* in which wagons and other machinery were stored. The threshing machine was permanently placed in a corner of the *Scheune*, and was powered by a large stationary motor which was housed in its own small building. The barn walls were brick, the roof was wood shingles, while the machine shed walls and roof were entirely of wood. In the corner of the attic above the machine shed was a fan mill, used to separate the grain from the chaff. The remaining portion of attic above the machine shed and barn was used to store feed for cattle, such as straw, hay and chaff, while that above the house was used to store grain.

On the other side of the well-sanded yard was a series of buildings starting with the *Nebenhaus* nearest the street. Then followed a double garage, an ash and smoke house, pens for cattle, chickens, hogs and finally a *sarai* ("A" frame) machine shed. In the front of the yard, facing the street, was a painted board fence, likely red. A number of other *Wirtschaften* had brick fences, so Johann Willms was thinking of going one better by installing a



THE JOHANN WILLMS BARN  
AND MACHINE SHED

HH/DH

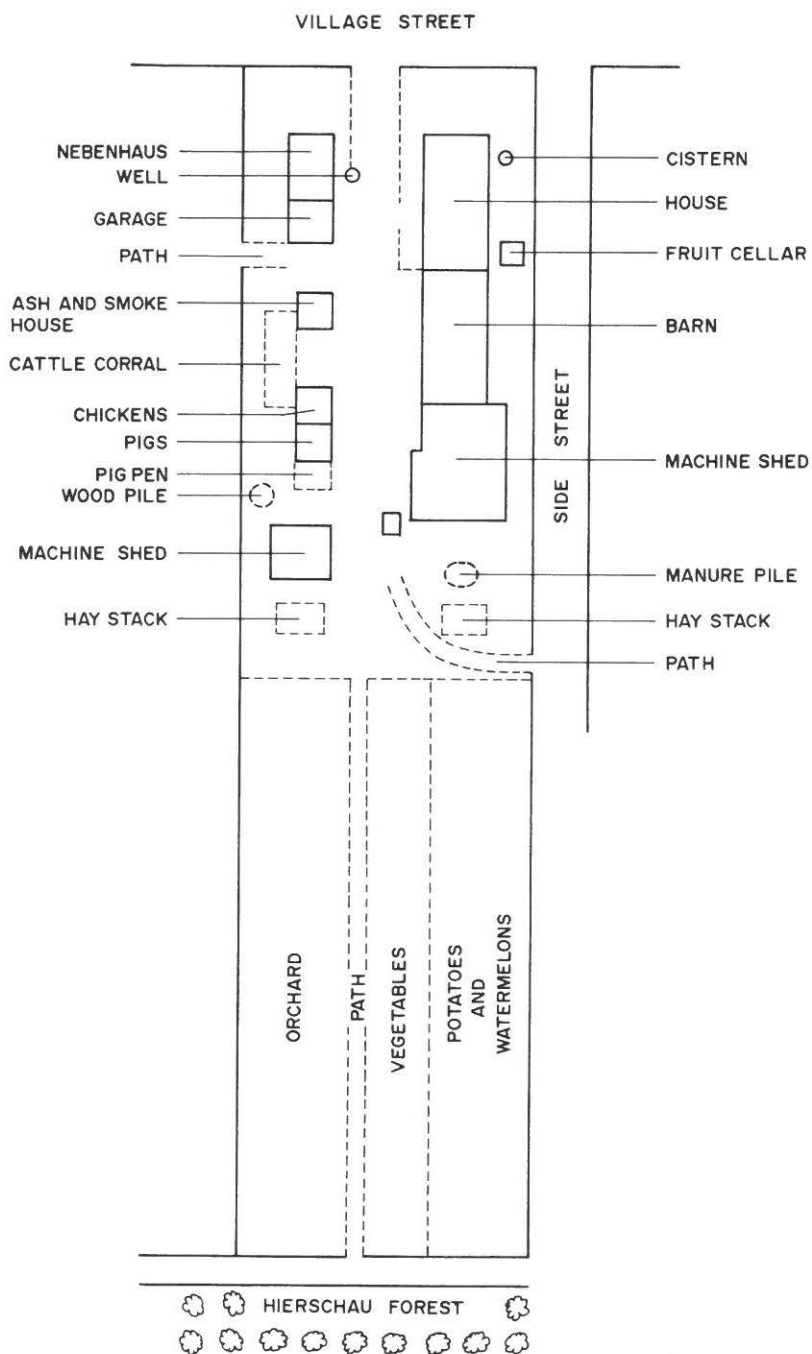
wrought-iron fence, but he died before his plans were carried out.<sup>6</sup> The front yard was largely a flower garden with some trees. Along the sides of the yard were more flowers such as roses and tulips, and again trees; both side borders of the yard were marked with thick hedges.

Behind the buildings were several straw-stacks, with the rest of the back of the yard devoted to a large orchard and vegetable garden. Beyond this was the forest road, and then the Willms portion of the Hierschau forest.<sup>7</sup>

## The Land

In addition to the yard and the forest, each *Wirtschaft* had access to a common pasture just north of the village. At about 6:30 in the morning the cowherd would start down the street, beginning at the Waldheim end, slowly walking and blowing his bugle. This would tell the farmer to finish his milking quickly and let the cows onto the street. Should a *Wirtschaft* send out its cattle too late, they would have to be chased down the street to join the rest of the herd (Low German: *Nojoage*). This was something to be avoided, since the whole village then knew who had slept in that morning! The cattle were driven onto the pasture via the *Uetjacht*, where the cowherd and his dogs tended them throughout the day, taking particular care to prevent them from straying onto the surrounding fields. About 5:30 in the afternoon the cowherd again drove the herd down the village street, each cow finding its own yard.<sup>8</sup>

The remaining land allotted to each *Wirtschaft* was divided into a number of sections located mainly south and north of the village, and according to the 1869 distribution report, up to 14 *werst* away.<sup>9</sup> In the early 1850s, an average of 21 *dessiatines* was cultivated on the typical Mennonite farm. With increasing demand for cereal grains this increased steadily, until it reached 45 *dessiatines* by 1888.<sup>10</sup> During this time of intensive expansion of grain farming, the four-field rotation system (one field being summer fallow) was partially abandoned, with 66% of land being planted to wheat. In the 1890s, however, a more balanced farming became common, with more crops such as corn, potatoes, watermelons and pumpkins being grown.<sup>11</sup> In Hierschau, the *Vollwirtschaft* had land in at least five different areas, each of these *Koagel* (Low German: plot of land) having a specific purpose and name. Exact location of the *Bestaun Koagel* (Low German: watermelon and pumpkin patch), as an example, might vary from year to year, depending on the system of crop rotation. See Table



THE JOHANN WILLMS WIRTSCHAFT, NO. 30

HH/DH

XV for distribution of the land and crops as recalled by former Hierschau citizens.<sup>12</sup> In addition, each *Wirtschaft* had a large garden plot just north of the river, where they grew potatoes, beets and other vegetables.

### TABLE XV HIERSCHAU LAND AREAS

*Hueskoagel*\* (house plot) — south of the village

Crops: wheat, barley, oats and rye

*Heikoagel* (hay plot) — north of the village, but also south of Hierschau on the Kurudjuschan River flatlands

Crops: hay

*Naeajen Morge* (nine units of a certain land area) — north and east of the village, near Stulnewo

Crops: wheat, barley, oats and rye

*Plauwinj* (low lying meadow which was often flooded) — possibly the same as the *Heikoagel*

*Bestaunkoagel* (watermelon and pumpkin plot) — north-east of the village

Crops: watermelons and pumpkins

\*Terms used in this table are all Low German

When they worked land close to the village, the farmers came home for meals, but when it was necessary to do field work farther from Hierschau, they stayed the whole day. Leaving early in the morning, they took along feed for the horses, and food for themselves.<sup>13</sup> With breaks for *Meddach* (Low German: noon meal) and *Faspa* (Low German: afternoon snack), work continued until sunset.

The watermelon and pumpkin fields presented a particular problem near harvest time, when thieves, both the winged and the human variety, appreciated the luscious crops. With all the farmers having fields in one area they hired a melon watchman during this season.<sup>14</sup> He lived on the field itself in a tepee-like house, the farmers in turn supplying him with food and fuel, while he diligently guarded their crops.<sup>15</sup>

In Hierschau there was great pride of ownership of specific *Wirtschaften*, with efforts made to improve all aspects of the operation. Even so, farms did change hands on occasion. Young farmers bought *Wirtschaften* or tried to expand, while older ones retired to smaller premises. Land prices reflected the value of the ruble, but also the economic state of the region, especially the possibility of marketing produce at a profit. In 1901, Johann Loewen and Kornelius Janzen of Hierschau sold their *Wirtschaften* for over 8,000 rubles each.<sup>16</sup> By 1913, Jakob Hildebrand bought a *Halbwirtschaft* for 15,000 rubles, while a *Vollwirtschaft* sold for 25,000.<sup>17</sup> Prices had more than tripled in the intervening 12 years.

## TABLE XVI GRAINS, FRUITS AND VEGETABLES GROWN IN HIERSCHAU

### FRUITS

- apples — many varieties with a number of locally used names such as
  - Franzaepfel* (a German variety of apple)
  - Jakobsaepfel* (a German variety of apple)
  - Schopnaes* (Low German: Sheep nose)
  - Drepp* (Low German: drop shaped)
  - Krimmer* (Crimean)
- plums — small white or yellow
  - blue or prune plums
- cherries
- apricots
- pears — large pears
  - small pears, *Kruschkje* (Russian: a small sweet pear commonly grown by the Mennonites)
- grapes — mainly on the north side of the village, toward the river

### BERRIES

- currants
- gooseberries
- strawberries
- raspberries
- mulberries — not grown specifically for the berries, but a by-product of the afforestation program and the silk-worm industry

## NUTS

- hazelnuts
- walnuts

## VEGETABLES

- potatoes
- cabbage — commonly used for borscht
- beets — often pickled
- cucumbers — pickled in large barrels
- beans
- peas
- onions
- carrots
- radishes
- lettuce — mostly leaf, occasionally head
- tomatoes
- watermelons — to eat
  - pickled in big barrels
  - shipped to market cities such as Simferopol
  - in later difficult times used to make syrup and sugar
- melons
- sunflowers — used as *Knacksot* (Low German: sunflower seeds roasted to crack and eat)
  - in difficult times used to make oil, the remaining pulp as cattle feed
- sugar beets — grown in later times to produce sugar
- sugar cane — to produce sugar
- corn — usually used as pig fodder, sometimes for horses
- pumpkins — cut up with hand operated cutters and fed to the cattle; said to increase milk production

## CEREAL GRAINS

- wheat — both winter and spring varieties. In 1888 the preference in the area seemed to be to spring wheat.<sup>18</sup> More recent accounts from Hierschau, however, reported winter wheat to be more commonly grown in the early twentieth century.<sup>19</sup>
- barley — feed for animals
- oats — feed for animals
- rye — seldom grown<sup>20</sup>

## Crops

Grains, vegetables and fruits commonly grown in Hierschau were likely typical of those produced throughout the Molotschna. The soil was rich, although the climate was dry. Temperatures were quite warm during the growing season, with a considerable frost-free period during the summer. There were times, for example in 1848, when drought and frost killed trees, but as a whole most shrubs and trees survived the extremes of the climate with proper attention. Each *Wirtschaft* grew a wide variety of crops, tending to be as self sufficient as possible, although some trading undoubtedly occurred should a particular farmer be short of something. Table XVI shows the crops grown by Hierschau farmers around the turn of the century.

Several crops, such as pumpkins and corn, were used as feed for the stock, whereas in North America varieties are grown which are useful for human consumption. Sugar beets were more commonly grown in the more difficult times, when it became impossible to purchase sugar in the stores. Other crops were put to wider use in these hard times; watermelons were used to produce syrup and sugar, and sunflower seeds were pressed for oil, the pulp being used as cattle feed.

## Farm Animals

Horses were an essential element of *Wirtschaft* operations since they provided the power to till the land and the principle means of transportation. On the average 65 dessiatine farm there were eight to ten work horses.<sup>21</sup> Hierschau continued the trend of breeding good horses set by Johann Cornies by having a number of registered purebred stallions from Belgium. They were kept on each farm for several weeks during the winter, then they would be let out to pasture with the other horses for the summer.<sup>22</sup> This cross-breeding with excellent purebred horses ensured that the general quality of animals foaled would be high. Hierschau horses were of excellent quality if a horseshow held at Neuhaubstadt in 1908 was any indication. Three Hierschau farmers were awarded prizes in various categories; among them was Heinrich Martens, whose fox red six-year-old was considered to be worth 500 rubles.<sup>23</sup> The Johann Willms *Wirtschaft*, prior to World War I, had a complement of about 12 horses; there were eight work horses, two for travel, and two utility.<sup>24</sup>

The German Red Cow (Russian: *Krasnaya Nyemka*) was developed by the Mennonites by crossing the strongest breeds of their East Frisian type with local cattle such as the grey Ukrainian



and the Nogaier herds. This produced a new breed which gave a little less milk, but was hardier.<sup>25</sup> The German Red Cow became very popular and prevailed in Chortitza and the Molotschna as well as in almost all of the daughter colonies.<sup>26</sup> Each farm had perhaps half a dozen cows, used mostly for milk and butter production. Hierschau had a bull, on occasion perhaps a number of them, used by all farmers for breeding purposes. The *Schulzenbott* supervised the management of the village bulls.

Many *Wirtschaften* also raised pigs, the Willms farm having enough to be able to slaughter four a year. They were housed in a pig barn and an additional outside pen, and were fed the household garbage as well as corn and barley chop. Butchering pigs was quite an occasion, usually accomplished in November or December. Two or three neighbours were invited to help and would arrive early for breakfast. Each village had an expert who knew how to stick pigs with a sharp smooth knife; for a time Kornelius Sperling fulfilled this job in Hierschau. After it had been bled to death, the entire pig was processed; by the end of the day everything was done. The hams were hung, the sausages made, and the gifts to the participating neighbours given. Upon invitation of the host, everyone sat down to a big supper, which included generous portions of the newly butchered meat. Occasionally, when a farmer had more meat than he needed, or if he needed some extra cash, he would sell a pig or a steer to the village butcher, who in turn would re-sell to any farmer who might run short.<sup>27</sup>

Some *Wirtschaften* owned sheep, although by the turn of the century their numbers were on the decline. Chickens, ducks and geese were found on most barnyards. Pigeons were commonly raised, and were often eaten in the autumn, when they were fat from feeding on grain. A few farmers in the village had turkeys.

Insects hardly qualify as farm animals, but for lack of a better classification they will be included here. A number of farmers kept bees. Not only did the bees produce honey, but they were also known to be very good for the gardens.<sup>28</sup> Under Cornies' supervision, silk worms were commonly raised, but this decreased in time. With the difficult period during and after the civil war, however, a number of farmers again started raising the worms to produce cloth for their own use.

Table XVII lists the complement of farm animals of the Johann Willms *Wirtschaft*, likely typical of most farmers in Hierschau.

## Machinery

Hierschau farmers took the mandate to be good examples

TABLE XVII  
FARM ANIMALS OF THE JOHANN WILLMS  
WIRTSCHAFT

Horses — 12, of which eight were for work only, two for travel, two utility
Cattle — about seven, mostly for milk and butter
Sheep — six
Pigs — enough so that four were slaughtered each year
Chickens — for eggs and meat
Geese — about 12
Pigeons — about 200
Dogs — usually at least several
Cats — always a number, to keep down the mouse population. <sup>29</sup>

seriously and as such maintained excellent *Wirtschaften*. This often included use of the best and the latest in farm machinery. An idea of what was available, and commonly used, can be gleaned from the advertising in *Friedensstimme*. J. J. Neufeld of Waldheim offered stationary naphtha fueled motors,<sup>30</sup> as well as threshing machines, plows, discs and swathers.<sup>31</sup> The J.I. Case Company had threshing machines and tractors, and offered interested customers a price list. Their small tractors could plow 4 to 7 dessiatines per day, while the large ones could manage 7 to 12.<sup>32</sup> A seed grain cleaner was available from Abraham D. Rempel, a machine which processed each kernel separately in 9 to 10 seconds.<sup>33</sup> The *Best* milk separator, made in Sweden, could handle from four to 18 pails per hour, with prices ranging from 25 to 65 rubles,<sup>34</sup> while the larger *Primus* model was more expensive, but could process up to 30 pails of milk per hour.<sup>35</sup>

New equipment often gave those farmers who owned it a decided advantage over their neighbours. With threshing machines it was said that "the grain can be taken from the fields right to the machine and be threshed. Some farmers own three to four wagons to transport grain and can thresh 15 to 18 fuder (wagon loads) in one day."<sup>36</sup> Those who went to the factory to buy new threshers that year found that they were all sold out. While much of the new machinery mentioned was commonly used in Hierschau, for some reason the tractors were not.

The Willms *Wirtschaft* used a five or six share *Schrotsplueach* (Low German: angled plow) pulled by four to six horses, for surface cultivation of the land. A seeder box was attached to the top so

that plowing and seeding could be completed in one operation.<sup>37</sup> This machine was likely the Drill-Bukker type, first manufactured in Russia about 1880.<sup>38</sup> Every three or four years the *Eenschoa* (Low German: one share), also pulled by four or six horses, was used to plow deeper, turning over the soil more thoroughly in the fall of the year. When the grain was ripe it was cut by a McCormick binder, imported from the United States. After it had been put in piles, the grain was carried to the yard in *Leiterwagen*, (ladder wagons) manufactured in the Molotschna, where it was threshed. The Willms had a Daimler stationary engine, imported from Germany, mounted on a solid pad which powered a Russian built threshing machine. Apparently Peter Neufeld also had a Daimler engine, but found it to be very temperamental, sometimes taking up to half a day to start. Gerhard Wiebe and Jakob Duerksen purchased Halbstadt built Schroeder engines, which were found to be more reliable.<sup>39</sup> The Willms also had a fan mill in the attic of the machine shed, used to separate the chaff from the grain.

It is possible that not all farmers, particularly owners of small farms, or those who were renters, had all the modern equipment. Before the powerful stationary engines became popular, even the *Vollwirtschaften* used horsepowered threshers. It is likely that the smaller enterprises continued to use the earlier flails and horsedrawn stone rollers to separate the grain.<sup>40</sup> With more difficult times in the 1920s and 30s most farms again reverted to this form of threshing.<sup>41</sup>

## Daily Chores

With the growing of wheat for export, and the availability of markets for some of their other products, the farmers had money available for the purchase of goods and equipment. Even so, each *Wirtschaft* tended as much as possible to be a self-sustaining, virtually independent unit. This was reflected in the variety and extent of work done by every single member of the family, from sweeping the sanded sidewalk to handling the deep single share plow.

The men of the family, generally speaking, did the work on the land such as plowing, reaping and threshing. One exception was the *klompelaja* (Low German: pile maker). It was women's work, either hired Russian girls or women of the family, to collect the swathed grain into piles. Work in the barn, such as the daily chores connected with cattle and horses was also done by the men, although *uetmeste* (Low German: cleaning out the manure) was oc-

casionally a shared duty, and milking cows was definitely done by the girls.

Housework in all its shapes and forms was the job of the women of the family. More extensive fall and spring cleaning sessions were part of this work, as were storage and preparation of food. Management of the large gardens, as well as meticulous care of the yard and flower beds, was under the jurisdiction of the mother and her daughters.

The farm started to stir when it was light enough outside to see. After a good breakfast, the men would head out to the fields, and the women would continue with their housework. Each person was expected to contribute, but jobs were fitted to age and ability. Young boys could obviously not manage the big plows, but they did ride the horse which pulled the cultivator. Girls might not have mastered the intricacies of kneading *Tweeback* (Low German: double buns), but they could sweep the yard. Time during the day was divided according to meals required, not tabulated to the minute. Clock watching was not a way of life as it is now, but when the shadow of the barn reached a certain spot on the yard, it was time to proceed with a designated task. Work in the evening generally continued until it was too dark to see.

While work was hard and undoubtedly taken seriously, the young people sometimes found time for other interests. Johann Willms and Heinrich Dyck caught mice on the field during harvest time. Johann sometimes would take them home and keep them as pets. On one such occasion, Heinrich put the mice into the front pocket of his coveralls, then forgot all about them. Two days later when the harvest workers were eating together, a horrible stench pervaded the area. When the source of the smell was finally discovered, it was found to be the dead, by then rotting mice in Heinrich's pocket.<sup>42</sup>

Even with all family members working hard on the *Wirtschaft*, not all tasks could be completed, so servants were often hired. Groups of Russians or Ukrainians would come around looking for work, so finding people to hire was easy. The Johann Willms *Wirtschaft* commonly had up to six girls and six men for the summer season, keeping perhaps one inside maid and one man for the outside work for the winter. The summer workers slept in the area which connected the house and the barn.<sup>43</sup>

Scheduling of specific jobs throughout the farm year was usually well worked out, and, with many types of crops and farm animals, required skillful management. In the earlier years *Unterhaltungsblatt* published a timetable to help those farmers

who were less experienced, although most Mennonites learned this as they grew up on the *Wirtschaft*.<sup>44</sup> Changing weather conditions could cause variations in the schedule, for example the spring seeding during a ten year period began as early as March 5, and as late as March 28. The end of the harvest varied from July 13 to August 2.<sup>45</sup>

## Acts of God

Most of *Wirtschaft* life consisted of hard, but relatively steady and eventually rewarding work. But the Molotschna was not Utopia, so there were also some difficulties. Not even the most careful planning could control the weather. Variations in schedule could be accommodated, but total amounts of precipitation were rather crucial. The climate in the Molotschna area tends to be rather dry, so the complaint of Hierschau farmers in 1901 was not unusual.

Our crops do not look very good. Whether it will be enough to tide us over is uncertain . . . Rye and winter wheat are soon ripe, but will be very light. Summer crops are small, and much of the spring wheat has been scorched. It has not rained much here, yet the grain could be better if the heat were not so intense. . . .<sup>46</sup>

Yet the following year the reports were better: "If we can harvest the crop the way the grain stands at the present time, then the wheat will be very good."<sup>47</sup> Storms were a constant threat and could, sometimes with accompanying hail, ruin a good crop. Even winter storms could influence yields. A farmer complained that ". . . from January 19 to Febraury 4 we had a severe storm, which blew up so much, that it was thought that the winter grain must have been blown away. . . ."<sup>48</sup> Hierschau correspondent Peter Warken-tin accepted vicissitudes of precipitation as a way in which God could speak to his people. With too much rain he wrote ". . . I believe the Lord is speaking to us, even through the water . . .",<sup>49</sup> whereas with just the right amount he thought that ". . . if the Lord gives his blessing, we can hope for a good crop."<sup>50</sup>

While flooding did occasionally occur, particularly with rapid run-off due to unusually changeable weather in spring,<sup>51</sup> fire was a much more frequent and constant threat. It seems that almost every news report included mention of a fire somewhere in the Molotschna. With typical organizational thoroughness, the Mennonites of the Molotschna established a fire insurance company; payment of insurance premiums and measures for fire prevention

became compulsory.<sup>52</sup> For the ten year period 1873-1882 the payments for fire losses in the Molotschna averaged 45,200 rubles per year,<sup>53</sup> representing replacement of two-thirds of the assessed value of the buildings and specified amounts for machinery and animals.<sup>54</sup> Very few fires were actually reported from Hierschau, the first one mentioned being a *Steppenfeuer* (grass or prairie fire) which began in Hierschau in the summer of 1904, then spread north to the Hamberg area. It destroyed much grain which had already been cut, with losses said to be enormous. The summer of 1904 must have been a very dry one, since at least seven villages reported fires, the most severe one being in Rueckenau, where 35 *Wirtschaften* burned.<sup>55</sup> The following year the buildings of the Sukkau family of Hierschau burned down at night. The Sukkaus were almost burned themselves. When they awakened they barely escaped by climbing through the windows.<sup>56</sup>

### Village Life

The daily dawn to dusk ritual of work on the Hierschau *Wirtschaft* did have occasional variations.

If people wanted their grain ground into cattle feed, they could go to Kornelius Boschmann, *Kleinwirt* at the Waldheim end of the village, who for a time had a horse-driven mill.<sup>57</sup> They could also take their feed grain to the windmill on the Landskrone end of the village, owned and operated at the turn of the century by Jakob Thiessen. If there was not enough wind at the time, he used a motor to drive the mill. For flour, particularly the finer grades, the Hierschau farmers took their grain to the steam mills in Waldheim.<sup>58</sup>

Dealers periodically came through the villages to buy grain, principally wheat, not required by the *Wirtschaft*. A group of wagons would come onto the yard, grain was brought down from the house attic in sacks and carefully weighed out on scales. Payments were made, then the fully laden train of wagons would head for the port cities such as Berdiansk.<sup>59</sup> After the railroad was completed, Stulnewo was the station through which the Hierschau grain was shipped.

Other traders came through the villages selling fish and fruit, such as grapes, apricots and cherries. The sound of:

*Fresche Fesch*

*Flinga Fesch*

*Fief Kopecha daut Punt*

*Diara nijch*<sup>60</sup> (Low German)

(Fresh fish

Flinga fish

Five kopecks a pound

No more than that)

announced to the housewives that the traders were on the street. So that the wagons would not return empty, the traders in turn bought goods such as eggs from the farmers. They would put down a layer of eggs, then a layer of chaff, followed by another layer of eggs and so on. Others took back a load of white earth from the *Weisseerdegrube*. Trade in butter also seems to have been common. Jakob Willms of Ladekopp in 1902 paid 23 kopecks per pound, occasionally up to 27 or 28 kopecks, then shipped it off in bulk to Simferopol.<sup>61</sup> The Willms *Wirtschaft* supplied the hospital in Waldheim with butter, but likely also sold to local traders. Each ten pound slab of butter was stamped with the *Wirtschaft* number, 30, in case there should be any question as to the quality of the product.<sup>62</sup>

The first stop for shopping in Hierschau was the dry goods store operated by Johann Hildebrandt. He lived in a *Kleinwirtschaft* on the Landskrone end of the village in a building that had formerly been a warehouse. He sold various household staples such as sugar and dried plums, coal oil for lamps, nails, bolts and other hardware goods. Waldheim also had a number of stores, but the real shopping sprees, at least for the more major purchases, were saved for the annual trip to Gross Tokmak, where there were a number of larger shops.<sup>63</sup>

As mentioned previously, the *Weisseerdegrube* was located near Hierschau, about a kilometer north and east of the village. While providing a welcome annual income for the village treasury, through the years it also provided employment for a fair number of the inhabitants. Gerhard Plett, who later became *Aeltester* of the Margenau-Landskrone-Alexanderwohl *Gemeinde*, leased the pit in 1890, and managed it for a number of years together with a small store. Peter Goertzen and Heinrich Sukkau ran the operation for some time, but Jakob Stobbe, of *Wirtschaft* No. 8, leased the pit for such a long time that he became known as "White Earth Stobbe."<sup>64</sup> White earth was obtained, presumably some form of lime, which was used as whitewash. Clay was also dug, which was useful for making pottery and bricks. Very fine sand of various colours was used for sidewalks and streets. The pits eventually became quite deep, so that cave-ins sometimes occurred. Heinrich, son of Jakob Stobbe, died in one such accident; a Mr. Penner and a Loewen were also killed.<sup>65</sup> Peter Wall was more fortunate, surviving a cave-in in 1912 or 1913 with no broken bones, but only bruises.<sup>66</sup>

## Summary

And so village life proceeded, regulated by the ongoing daily

and yearly cycle of tasks demanded by the *Wirtschaft*. To the Menonite farmer in Hierschau, God spoke most directly through the waving heads of ripened winterwheat, through the sweet taste of juicy watermelons, through the satisfaction of a full larder when the cold winds of winter started to blow.



## VIII RELIGIOUS LIFE

In most of its early years Hierschau was geographically situated in the area served by the Margenau-Schoensee congregation of the *Grosse Gemeinde*. The exact name and the villages involved in this congregation varied from time to time. In 1874 much of the village of Alexanderwohl emigrated to the United States, and with reorganization of the remaining congregation, it also became part of the Margenau church. The Schoensee portion seems to have separated, and in 1890 the Alexanderkrone members formed their own congregation. Eventually the remaining congregation became known as the Margenau-Landskrone-Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church, with a building in each of these villages. The Landskrone church building was erected in 1910, and was large and very beautiful. For a time, after the construction of this new house of worship, the Landskrone group was independent, but it soon again rejoined the larger area church.<sup>1</sup>

The original *Aeltester* of the Margenau-Schoensee congregation, Heinrich Wiens, was deposed and banished from Russia in 1847. Heinrich Toews, *Aeltester* at Pordenau, then also served Margenau-Schoensee for 14 years. Subsequent elders were Bernhard Peters (1861-1887), Heinrich Koop (1887-1901) and Peter Friesen (1901-1907).<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Plett, born and raised in Hierschau, was first a village teacher, then a minister in the congregation. He was chosen *Aeltester*, first of the Margenau congregation in 1907, then also of the Landskrone and Alexanderwohl portions of the church a few years later. He remained in this position until poor health forced his retirement in 1928, when Heinrich T. Janz of Landskrone was ordained.<sup>3</sup> (For details about Gerhard Plett see capsule biography.)

Probably early in 1906, Peter and Anna Warkentin moved from Waldheim to a *Kleinwirtschaft* in Hierschau.<sup>4</sup> Peter was also a minister in the *Kirchliche Gemeinde* (Grosse Mennonite Church). Officially he was a relief preacher at the Landskrone church,<sup>5</sup> but he often visited the sick and went on itinerant preaching assignments.<sup>6</sup> He and his wife assumed the role of Hierschau correspondents to the *Mennonitische Rundschau* after the death of H.J. Thiessen.

When there was renewal of spiritual life in Gnadenfeld, and the formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church, Hierschau itself seems to have been affected only marginally. It must be noted, however, that a fair number of Hierschangers did become Mennonite Brethren soon after they moved to other villages or

emigrated to America. The influence of the *Grosse Gemeinde* remained strong in Hierschau, particularly with Gerhard Plett, member of one of the largest family groups in the village, as *Aeltester*.

The Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church had its principal house of worship in Rueckenau,<sup>7</sup> but a number of subgroups formed congregations and also built churches in Tiege, Tiegenhagen, Alexandertal, Sparrau and Waldheim.<sup>8</sup> Gradually the Mennonite Brethren Church had an increasing number of members within Hierschau itself, relating to the Waldheim congregation. Kornelius Boschmann (Sr.) was a well-liked Mennonite Brethren minister of the Waldheim congregation. He originally owned a *Vollwirtschaft* in Hierschau, then retired to a *Kleinwirtschaft* in his declining years. He often spoke at weddings<sup>9</sup> or funerals, and visited the sick. He was described as having a long grey beard, and looked like a Biblical prophet, perhaps Elijah. "He was a good, understandable speaker. Everyone liked him."<sup>10</sup> When Jakob Duerksen, the *Oberschulze* of the Gnadenfeld *Wolost* was sick, Kornelius Boschmann was very faithful in visiting him. Even though the Duerksen family was traditionally *Kirchlich*, Boschmann, together with *Aeltester* Gerhard Plett, spoke at Jakob Duerksen's funeral.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the literal interpretation of the Bible makes the Mennonites more prone to consider the Sabbath to be exceptionally significant, but for whatever reason there were a number of converts to the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Hierschau as well. A Mr. Goosen from Friedensdorf visited the various villages, and through his influence Johann Hildebrandt, the store owner, and Kornelius Janzen, owner of *Wirtschaft* No. 11, were converted to these beliefs.<sup>12</sup>

A clear bright summer Sunday morning in Hierschau must have been interesting. The larger number of people would either walk or hitch up their buggies, and head west to the Landskrone church to hear *Aeltester* Plett. They would pass other parishioners going in the opposite direction to the services at the Waldheim Mennonite Brethren Church. Both of these groups would pass the Janzen *Wirtschaft*, where Kornelius took great delight in working in the front garden on Sunday mornings. He had already been in church on Saturday.<sup>13</sup>

While there certainly were tensions between the different church groups, one should not get the impression that there was total lack of fellowship between them. In winter, with inclement weather, joint services were often held in Hierschau itself. One end of the Heinrich Sukkau *Scheune* served as the church, while the

other end was a wood-working shop where the Sukkaus made coffins. Special services on holidays, or with guest speakers, were also held in this makeshift sanctuary.<sup>14</sup> Wednesday night Bible studies and Saturday prayer meetings commonly used this facility as well. For many years Sunday School, which was taught on Sunday afternoon, was convened in the living room of Widow Dyck, but was also held in the *Sommer Stube* of the Jakob Willms.<sup>15</sup> The teachers were apparently well prepared and seem to have left an indelible impression on their students.<sup>16</sup>

But Hierschangers had a view of life which encompassed more than their own limited community. A missions festival in Waldheim, held on July 4, 1910, had participants from various parts of the Molotschna. Peter Warkentin of Hierschau was one of the five speakers, using John 17:17-18 as text, while Johann Penner, also of Hierschau, made the closing remarks, citing Matthew 8:1-4.<sup>17</sup> Other missions festivals, Bible conferences and youth meetings had wide support, including that of Hierschau.

The Mennonite Brethren German newspaper *Friedensstimme* for a number of years listed contributions to various charities, and again the people of Hierschau demonstrated their widespread concerns. In 1907 they contributed 140 rubles "for those who are starving" as well as materials and clothing worth another 50 rubles.<sup>18</sup> A number of donations came in for Persia in 1908,<sup>19</sup> for India in 1910.<sup>20</sup> Local charities were not forgotten, with many gifts, large and small, given to the hospital in Waldheim, for the orphanage in Grossweide, the mental hospital Bethania and other institutions. Compatriots less well off than they, such as settlers in the Terek and in Siberia, also received help.

But Hierschau had its skeptics as well. Benjamin Duerksen, a single fellow who lived in a *Kleinwirtschaft*, and worked in the white earth pits, used to collect the boys of the village and regale them with stories. Sitting on the banks of the tiny river he would while away the pleasant afternoons listening to nature around him, naming each of the large croaking frogs after one of the local Mennonite Brethren ministers. The boys seemed to think this was hilarious and must have passed the stories on, since even the girls, who were not present, remember them.<sup>21</sup>

On the whole the people of Hierschau were, as Heinrich J. Thiessen remarked, moral, energetic and hard-working.<sup>22</sup> Mennonites in the Molotschna tended to be law abiding citizens, seldom actually requiring police action, though there were some exceptions. In 1880, for example, a shopkeeper in Lichtfelde had, through cunning, obtained other people's money, then absconded



Mennonite Brethren Frogs

with it, presumably to America.<sup>23</sup> In 1910 the Halbstadt Regional Court found two farmers guilty of selling meat from a sick cow they had butchered, and handed out appropriate sentences.<sup>24</sup> Very little in the way of actual crime committed by the inhabitants of Hierschau is recorded, although the circumstances of the death of one housewife were somewhat suspicious. Presumably the intrinsic moral character of the people, combined with the watchful eye of the church and the village administration, kept things on an even keel.

During the revolutionary years and in the following famine there was a time of deep soul searching in the Mennonite colonies.<sup>25</sup> The churches became more active, with Mennonite Brethren, *Allianz Gemeinde* (Alliance Church) and also *Kirchliche* Church ministers often being involved in itinerant evangelistic work. The revival spread from the Molotschna to Chortitza, Sagraadowka and other colonies in the Ukraine.<sup>26</sup> David M. Hofer, of Chicago, Illinois, was a Mennonite Central Committee worker who was sent to the southern Ukraine to help in the distribution of food during the time of starvation. He also had a heart for evangelism. In January, 1923, after completing his other work in Halbstadt, he began an evangelistic campaign in Waldheim. He reported:

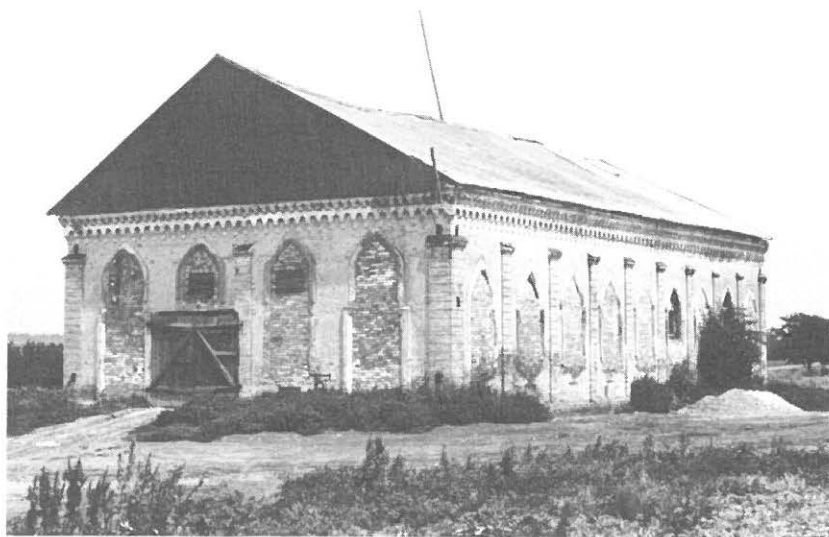
Even in the first meeting one could feel the presence of the Lord, and that he was working there. Every evening the congregation grew, every evening the believers were renewed. Every evening the Lord added a small group of repentant sinners . . . there was a seeking and a struggling such as we have never seen it . . .<sup>27</sup>

In the first four evenings 167 people repented of their sins. The meetings were extended and the total number of those who were seeking and found salvation rose to 300. During the day Hofer held Bible studies and made house visitations.<sup>28</sup>

Many Hierschauerers attended the Hofer evangelistic meetings and were profoundly influenced by the messages. It was likely teacher Johann A. Goerz of Hierschau who publicly confessed that he had been a blind leader of the blind and sought renewal. Some whole families and parts of others (including members of prominent families) experienced spiritual revival, many then joining the Mennonite Brethren Church. It was during this time that there was renewed interest in Bible studies and prayer meetings in Hierschau. But there was also some counter-reaction to the cam-



The choir standing in front of the Landskrone Church probably about 1925



The Landskrone Church in 1982

paing of Hofer, perhaps not so much against the message, as the method. According to one observer, "He terrified his hearers with Hell — instead of emphasizing the saving love of Jesus — and yet that may also have its place according to 2 Timothy 4:2."<sup>29</sup> *Aeltester* Plett of the Margenau-Landskrone-Alexanderwohl *Gemeinde* undoubtedly felt the challenge to his leadership, since some of his members experienced spiritual renewal and joined the Mennonite Brethren. Some people expected him actively to defend the position of the established church, but at least from the pulpit there was little direct action. One of his parishioners felt that in a subtle way *Aeltester* Plett did inform the congregation of his stance, by preaching on a text, likely Psalm 72:17 ("May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun"), which conveyed the idea of the enduring nature of God and his church.<sup>30</sup> Despite obvious differences, *Aeltester* Plett still thought enough of the overall work of D.M. Hofer, to contribute a note of thanks for the work of the Mennonite Central Committee. This was published in a book later written by Hofer describing the period of starvation in Russia.<sup>31</sup>

Because of increasing disability due to an arthritic condition, *Aeltester* Plett retired from his position. On May 13, 1928, at a ceremony held at the Landskrone sanctuary, he laid down his mantle, and at the same time presided at the installation of the newly elected Heinrich T. Janz, of Landskrone.<sup>32</sup> *Aeltester* Janz continued to serve the congregation faithfully, although with the anti-religious attitude of the Soviet government this became steadily more difficult. Janz was likely still functioning as the *Aeltester* of the church when he delivered the oration at the funeral of Gerhard Plett in 1933.<sup>33</sup> High taxes, which neither Janz nor the congregation could pay, eventually led to Janz leaving his position. With relentless government opposition, congregational life gradually disintegrated, so that probably in 1933 or soon thereafter the church ceased to function. The beautiful Landskrone church still stands in a field near the road. Its windows are bricked shut, and it now functions as a granary.<sup>34</sup>

The Mennonite Brethren Church in Waldheim remained active into the late 1920s, with ministers such as Peter Koehn, Gerhard Unruh, and later the young Isaak Ewert.<sup>35</sup> With emigration, many of the leaders left for Canada. In 1930 some of the remaining leaders, such as Johann Goertzen and the long-standing choir director, Johann Rahn, were exiled to Siberia.<sup>36</sup> It is likely that the church ceased to function soon after that. The church building still remained, and was later used as a clubhouse and movie theater.<sup>37</sup>



GERHARD PLETT  
Servant Of God  
(1860-1933)

Gerhard Plett was born in Hierschau June 30, 1860, to Julius and Elisabeth Plett. Julius Plett, wife Anna Baerg and three sons, had moved from Pordenau to Hierschau as original settlers when the village was founded in 1848. Another three sons were born there, then wife Anna died in 1858. Elisabeth Voth of Friedensdorf became the new mother of the family, and her second son was Gerhard. Another three sons and three daughters followed to complete the family of 11 sons and three daughters.<sup>1</sup>

Gerhard spent his childhood and youth in Hierschau, completing primary school in his home village. Subsequent education was obtained at night school under the supervision of teacher Johann Doerksen. This likely took the form of helping to set the direction, rather than specific instruction, for in his widespread interest and knowledge, Gerhard appeared to be largely self-made. He worked hard, for in his diary he remarked, "I spent most of my childhood and youth at my studies."<sup>2</sup>

On May 21, 1897, Gerhard was baptized in Margenau by *Aeltester* Bernhard Peters. He then accepted a position as teacher in a village called Schamk, near Spat in the Crimea. In the autumn of 1881, while he was in the Crimea, he was drafted, but was able to avoid serving in the *Forstei* because of family circumstances.

On June 3, 1882, Gerhard married Elisabeth Klassen of Fuerstenau. At about the same time he was appointed as teacher in Sparrau, Molotschna, a position he held for six years. The Gerhard Plett family then moved to Waldheim, where he was also likely a teacher, and in 1890 they again moved, this time to Hierschau, Gerhard's home village. They bought a *Kleinwirtschaft*, took over the management of the *Weisseerdegrube* and established a small store. The store sold provisions to the drivers of the vehicles which came from far and wide to transport the white earth. It is not certain whether Gerhard also taught school in Hierschau in the first years of his settlement there, although he was known as Teacher Plett, which suggests that he did.

Soon after the return to Hierschau, about one month after the birth of a child, his wife Elisabeth died, on June 2, 1890. Gerhard married Katharina Willms of Nikolaidorf later that same year, on December 27, 1890.<sup>3</sup> In all, 15 children were born to the Plett family, of which seven died at a relatively young age. The children of first wife Elisabeth Klassen were:



Franz I	b. May 31, 1883	d. before April 4, 1890
Elisabeth I	b. August 12, 1884	d. August 12, 1886
Gerhard I	b. August 26, 1885	d. July 31, 1886
Gerhard II	b. October 2, 1888	
Franz II	b. April 4, 1890	d. October 27, 1890

The children of his second wife Katharina Willms were:

Jakob	b. December 7, 1891	d. October 17, 1894
Elisabeth II	b. March 23, 1893	
Kornelius	b. December 1, 1894	d. February 23, 1916
Peter	b. September 15, 1896	d. November 4, 1896
Maria	b. November 14, 1897	
Katharina	b. February 21, 1900	
Heinrich	b. December 20, 1901	
Enelse	b. July 3, 1904	
Gertrude	b. March 29, 1906	
Aganetha	b. June 21, 1911	

With the several business undertakings, Gerhard Plett soon became reasonably wealthy, so when his father Julius died in 1892, he was able to purchase the family *Vollwirtschaft*, No. 12, on the north side of the street.

Gerhard Plett seemed to have the confidence of his fellowmen, since he was appointed *Bezirksrichter* (district judge), a position he held until 1904. He was also a member of the Molotschna *Schulrat* (school board), and as such had to visit schools and supervise the teaching of religion and German.

In 1899 Gerhard was elected as a minister of the Margenau Mennonite Church, and in 1904 he divested himself of other responsibilities to devote his full energies to this calling. When *Aeltester* Peter Friesen died in 1907, Gerhard Plett, on December 6, 1907, was elected to replace him. He was ordained by *Aeltester* Heinrich Koop of Alexanderkrone on Pentecost Sunday, 1908. The prayer of those present was, "The Lord help him in his difficult task."<sup>4</sup> Two years later he also assumed the responsibility for the Landskrone church, and, when *Aeltester* Johann Schartner died, the Alexanderwohl congregation was also added to his responsibilities.

According to his own as well as the public records, *Aeltester* Plett led a full, active and very busy life. He kept meticulous notes, and one year found that he had made 400 trips on church business. First as "*Lehrer* (teacher) Gerhard Plett"<sup>5</sup> then as "*Prediger*"



*Aeltester* Gerhard Plett



*Aeltester* Gerhard Plett at the funeral of his son Kornelius

(preacher)<sup>6</sup> and later as “*Aeltester* Gerhard Plett”<sup>7</sup> he is listed as participating in many church and public functions, both in Hierschau and in other Molotschna villages. As *Aeltester* he also took part in committees and commissions, as required by this position. When settlers in Siberia requested help from the mother colony, particularly from the churches, he was on the committee that dealt with this call for aid.<sup>8</sup> But Gerhard Plett did not neglect the nurture of his own congregation, and in all, baptized 1543 people throughout his career as *Aeltester*.<sup>9</sup>

When World War I broke out Gerhard Plett was among those at a meeting of church leaders who declared they would pray for Czar and country.<sup>10</sup> As part of the alternative service during the war his son Kornelius served in the *Forstei* in the Crimea. Hearing that Kornelius was ill, *Aeltester* Plett went to visit his son. A day or so after his father arrived, Kornelius died of the “black pox,” on February 23, 1916. The grieving father also fulfilled the role of *Aeltester* and officiated at the funeral.

The position as *Aeltester* of a large and widespread congregation undoubtedly brought certain acclaim and respect, but also attracted unwanted attention. In January, 1922, *Aeltester* Plett and Aron Wall (newly married to Maria Braun and visiting his mother-in-law in Hierschau) were apprehended, together with about 60

other men.<sup>11</sup> They were kept in the basement of a house adjoining the hospital in Waldheim, a cell so small that not everyone could even lie down. The specific reason for this imprisonment was never disclosed, but perhaps it was a random selection of village and church officials.<sup>12</sup> The floor of the cell was of stone, and was cold and wet. Even when room was found for *Aeltester* Plett to lie down, it was terribly uncomfortable at the best of times. Despite the trying circumstances he did not forget his calling. This imprisonment represented the last hours in the lives of some of the men, since a number were taken out at night to be shot. *Aeltester* Plett tried to comfort and pray with them in this difficult time.

When his son Gerhard visited the *Aeltester* in the cell, and noticed his deteriorating physical condition, he was able to, through the services of Doctor Franz Dueck, obtain a transfer to the hospital after he had been incarcerated 14 days. *Aeltester* Plett required a month of hospital stay to recuperate, then was allowed to go home. Increasing disability due to an arthritic condition, possibly gout,<sup>13</sup> dates from this time of imprisonment.

Despite his personal medical difficulties, *Aeltester* Plett continued to serve and represent his church. With the period of famine in Russia from 1921 to 1923, many lives, particularly among the Mennonites, were saved by the American Mennonite relief efforts. *Aeltester* Plett responded to this generous help with an official word of thanks through the pages of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. "We, dear people, can neither reward nor pay you for your act of mercy, but we can diligently ask the Lord, the giver of all good gifts, that he may do it."<sup>14</sup> A brief evaluation of the past years and a word of thanks was also included in a book by D.M. Hofer. On June 10, 1923, *Aeltester* Plett wrote:

After a number of years of very difficult times, we now have, through the grace of God, the possibility of breathing somewhat easier in the future . . . had not the brothers and sisters from America and Holland helped us . . . many Mennonites would have died . . . Our prayer is that his punishment of our people not be in vain . . .<sup>15</sup>

It was clearly his perception that part of the Mennonite dilemma was likely divine retribution for past iniquity.

With spiritual revival in a number of areas in southern Russia, in Hierschau precipitated to some degree by D.M. Hofer's series of evangelistic meetings in neighbouring Waldheim, there was undoubtedly some tension with the existing church hierarchy. A

number of families, or parts of families, joined the Mennonite Brethren Church, but usually before this happened they would see *Aeltester* Plett to withdraw their membership from the *Grosse Gemeinde*. Neither the departing member nor the *Aeltester* particularly enjoyed these interviews. It remained the task of *Aeltester* Plett to calm the waters and to minister to his flock. Despite poor health he continued in his work, which included interviewing baptismal candidates, performing baptisms and officiating at communion.<sup>16</sup>

Eventually, because of the advancing arthritic condition, which by then made it impossible for him to walk with a cane, Gerhard Plett retired from his position as *Aeltester*. On May 13, 1928, a big celebration was held in the Landskrone church, in which *Aeltester* Plett, as the final function of this office, officiated at the installation of the newly elected Heinrich T. Janz. Using II Corinthians 4:5-7 as text, he reminded the congregation that he felt a bit like the man of God, Moses, when he was approaching the border of Canaan. He trusted that God would give the people a leader upon whom his spirit would rest, so that they would not be a flock without a shepherd. The Lord had shown the congregation that this man was to be Heinrich Janz. Towards the end of the celebration, G. Enns, who had been officially commissioned to do so by the church, gave the retiring *Aeltester* recognition for his work and thanked him, then also welcomed the newly appointed Heinrich Janz.<sup>17</sup>

Gerhard Plett continued to live in Hierschau despite difficult circumstances. In December, 1930, with the Communist program of collectivization, ministers were often among the first affected. After having been forced to pay increasingly high taxes, he was eventually evicted from his house and yard on February 17, 1931. Because of his crippled condition, he was allowed to keep his bed and chair, but only those two items. The spirit which had characterized his whole life continued even in these trying circumstances, as he shook the hands and wished well the very men who were forcing him out of his home. Gerhard Plett was able to stay at the Heinrich Sawatzkys of Landskrone, but when a similar fate overtook that family in the summer of 1931, David Hildebrandt, son-in-law of Gerhard Plett, secretly took him in to his own home, back in Hierschau. Despite attempts to keep knowledge of his stay at the Hildebrandt's secret, it became necessary for him to be moved again. By now his health was deteriorating rapidly, and he was completely bedridden. One hot June day Gerhard was again loaded onto a wagon, and transported to the home of Jakob

Voth in Friedensdorf (these were likely relatives of his mother).

Gradually Gerhard Plett's disability increased, together with the associated pain. On April 1, 1933, he died peacefully. The funeral was on April 5, in the home where he had found his final refuge, that of the Jakob Voths. *Aeltester* Heinrich T. Janz of Landskrone delivered the funeral oration with Gerhard's wife and all but one of the children present. Even a number of Communists appeared at the funeral to pay this servant of God their final respects. He was buried at the cemetery in Friedensdorf.

## IX TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

What contact did the average Hierschau farmer have with his neighbours, with the next village, or with the outside world? A brief review of some aspects of transportation and communications in the Molotschna, as it would have affected the village of Hierschau, may be of some interest.

### The Village

Communication within each village in the Molotschna was good. While horses or buggies could be used, and bicycles and later even motor bikes were available, walking along the village streets was common. Most of the villages were small enough, usually with only one street, so that it was easily possible to reach any part on foot without difficulty, even in poor weather. It did, however, require some effort to keep the village street and sidewalk passable. As soon as the street was dried out in spring, certain villagers were assigned to harrow the street. This eliminated any ruts left by wagon wheels and lumps left by horses. The sidewalks along the street and around the houses were also repaired from winter damage by having them covered with a new layer of sand, which was obtained from the village sand pit.<sup>1</sup>

To make sure that everyone in the village got a message, such as notification of a meeting, a note was simply passed from *Wirtschaft* to *Wirtschaft* up and down the street. Invitations to funerals and weddings, which usually involved the entire village population, were commonly sent in this way.

### Roads

While maintenance of roads and bridges within the village boundaries was the responsibility of the *Schulze*, it is likely that the roads beyond the village borders were left to fend for themselves. Some effort was made to make trips a reasonably pleasant experience. There was a nice alley of trees between Hierschau and Waldheim, but the road surface was another matter. Yet travel between villages was common. Peter Harms, for example, returning from Hillsboro, Kansas, in 1881, to visit his old home region, made stops in Gnadenheim, Friedensdorf, Landskrone and Hierschau, all in one day.<sup>2</sup> Heinrich J. Thiessen, as reported in his letters, frequently travelled through a large portion of the Molotschna in one day, which often included a brief stop to chat with his friends in Hierschau.<sup>3</sup> But there are also repeated references to times when

travel was difficult, mainly due to mud, in wet weather. On December 3 and 4, 1901, in Rueckenau, then the following two days in Alexanderwohl, there were Bible conferences. It was reported:

Yet the Lord did not provide the wished for weather for either, for it was very muddy, so that driving was almost impossible . . . most participants came on foot or on horse . . . It has been muddy here for about two weeks, with daily rain, so that the roads are virtually impassable.<sup>4</sup>

A similar fate befell a Gnadenfeld District Council meeting. "Because of the tremendous mud and almost impassable roads several of those who were to be there could not appear."<sup>5</sup>

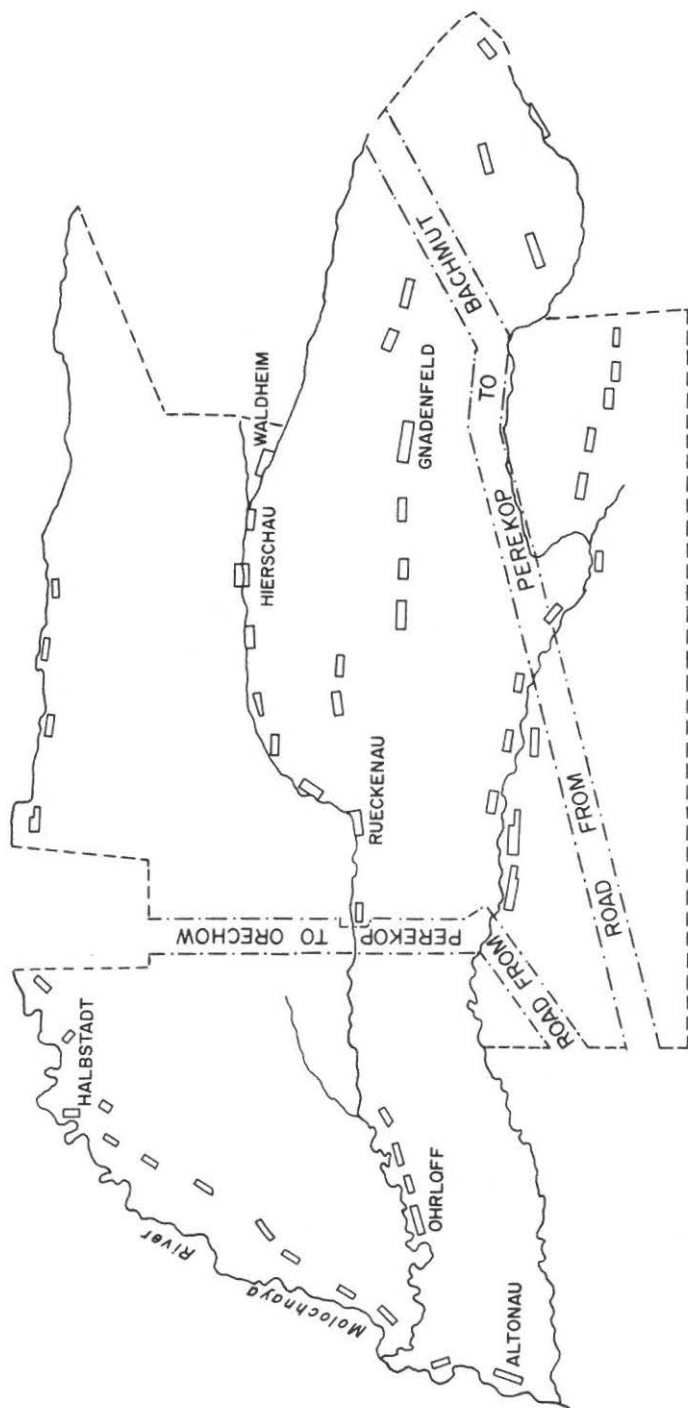
Highways or roads which led from one region of the country to another often were simply wide open areas, wide enough to provide pasture for the horses en route. One such road from Bachmut to Perekop crossed through the Molotschna obliquely in a generally east-west direction, while the road from Orechow to Perekop crossed the colony in a north-south direction.<sup>6</sup> This north-south route seems to have been a way into the Crimea, likely used by the Russian troops when they moved south during the Crimean War.<sup>7</sup> These highways fared no better in poor weather than did the roads within the Molotschna, and even with the advent of the automobile, getting stuck in the mud was a problem. Arthur Slagel, Mennonite Central Committee worker, reported:

Thawing was already started but we thought the frost overnight would last long enough to let us get to Halbstadt, so we started out on the way early on the morning of March 2. It soon started to melt, however . . . so it came that we often got stuck, and the automobile had to be pulled out. Luckily the chauffeur was very strong and we always got through.<sup>8</sup>

## Horsepower

The most common means of transportation for longer distances in the Mennonite colonies during the nineteenth and into the twentieth century was by horsedrawn wagons or carriages. *Wirtschaften* might have about 12 horses, of which eight were draft animals, two utility, and two reserved especially for travelling.<sup>9</sup> The Mennonites took great pride in their horses, and carefully bred excellent draft and riding horses. Various types of wagons and carriages were available. The standard farm wagon frame could be fit-

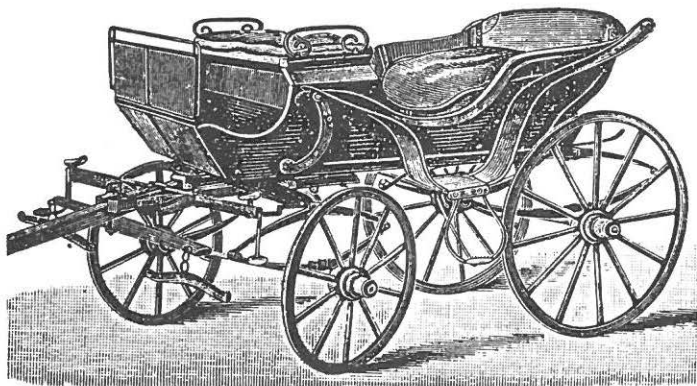




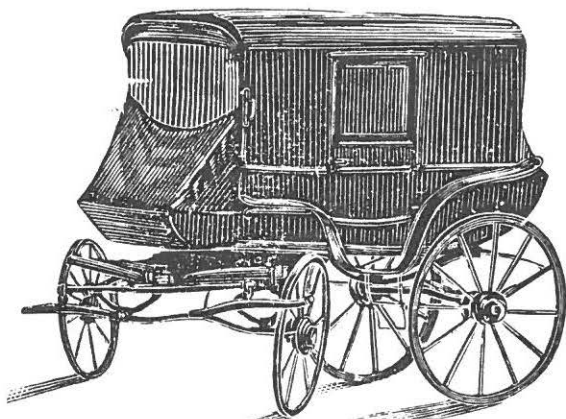
## MOLOTSCHNA ROADS

ACCORDING TO HIPPENMAYER, 1852

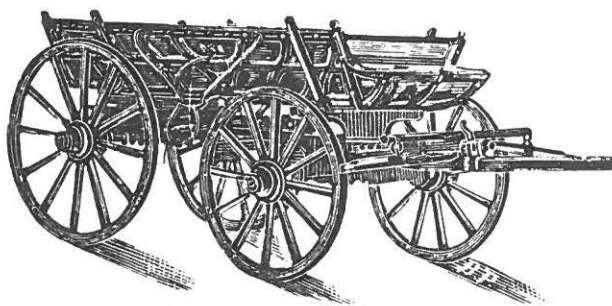
H/HH/DH



Droschka



Verdeckfederwagen



Farm wagon with box

Wagons commonly used by the Mennonites

ted with a box, for hauling commodities such as grain, but could also be lengthened and fitted with ladders to become *Leiterwagen*, which were used to carry hay or other bulky goods. The Mennonite wagons, together with their Mennonite drivers, were used extensively for transporting troops and hauling supplies during the Crimean War.<sup>10</sup> Prior to the advent of trains the common method of hauling grain or other agricultural products to the southern ports or the Crimean market cities was also by wagon.

People often travelled by two-wheeled buggy, particularly when it was muddy, though the four-wheeled *droschka* was probably the most common method of transportation. Every self-respecting Mennonite farmer had one.<sup>11</sup> The *obojaner* was also four-wheeled, and apparently a little larger than the *droschka*. Likely for more comfort, and particularly in inclement weather, the *Verdeckfederwagen* (covered wagon with springs) was often used. A number of companies manufactured wagons in the Molotschna, probably mostly on order. Kornelius Funk of Tiege, in 1906, advertised *Verdeckfederwagen*, *Droschken*, *Obojaner* and *Phaetone*, (light four-wheeled carriage) at reasonable prices with good workmanship.<sup>12</sup> In 1914 there were 1,106 *Verdeckfederwagen*, 1,668 *Droschken* and a total of 5,729 farm wagons in the Molotschna, fairly evenly divided between the two districts.<sup>13</sup>

## Automobiles

While the era of horsepower with well built wagons and elegant carriages was to continue for some time into the twentieth century, a new wind was blowing. The Mennonites of South Russia kept their fingers on the pulse of new agricultural machinery developments, but also kept a careful watch on transportation. The age of the automobile began early in the twentieth century in North America and Europe, and took only a few years to reach South Russia. The first advertising for, and presumably purchase of automobiles in the Molotschna likely began in 1909. Jakob Staess of Halbstadt first sponsored small written ads beginning on May 30, 1909,<sup>14</sup> then later the same year ran a half-page ad in the *Friedensstimme*, picturing an Opel *Doppelphaeton* (four-seater car, or sedan).<sup>15</sup> First class construction was promised, together with low gasoline and oil consumption, easy maintenance and a quiet motor (*geraeuschloser Lauf*). Unfortunately, although this was of course designed to better serve the special needs of honoured customers, there was a four month waiting period for delivery of the vehicles. Soon advertising for other automobiles by a variety of dealers appeared. The newest model Laurin and Klement was only

available at Schlapakoff and Co. in Simferopol, while the Berlie was for someone who wanted a good, long lasting, yet elegant car.<sup>16</sup> Sudermann Brothers, of Halbstadt, picturing a beautiful young lady adoring her doll of an automobile (calling it "*Mein Pueppchen*"), offered various sizes of Opels in 1914. A small four-seater, completely outfitted, could be driven off the lot for only 2,850 rubles.<sup>17</sup> The ancillary automobile industries were not far behind initial sales. Getting stuck was a problem both in summer rains and winter thaws, so chains were offered, something every automobile driver should have.<sup>18</sup> Kolumbus tires, available at Sudermann Brothers, guaranteed safe travelling on snow and ice.<sup>19</sup>

While other methods of travel still predominated, automobiles slowly became more common in the Molotschna. In 1914 there were 29 in the whole colony, with 27 in the Halbstadt *Wolost*, only two in the Gnadenfeld district.<sup>20</sup> At least one automobile, likely an Opel, was owned by the Isaak Neufelds of Waldheim, part owners of an implement factory.<sup>21</sup> In the early years there were no automobile owners in Hierschau, but with the village being on the road from Halbstadt to Waldheim, vehicles occasionally passed through. Despite the promise of a "*geraeuschloser Lauf*", the youngsters of Hierschau "could always hear the puffing from a long way off," and would come running, even from the far reaches of the garden, to watch an automobile huff and clatter its way down the street.<sup>22</sup>

With the blazing strength of 30 or 40 horsepower motors, automobile drivers in the Molotschna appear to have been no less human than motorists have been ever since that time. Speeding was a problem. A note addressed to drivers in 1913 gives a warning:

It has occurred repeatedly, yes it happens quite often, that automobile owners drive along the village streets at speeds greater than the law allows. Especially on the narrow streets of Neuhalbstadt, where there is much horse, bicycle and foot traffic, automobile drivers should be careful . . . At the request of the Neuhalbstadt village council we inform those to whom it applies, that the speed limits can be enforced through the judicial system.<sup>23</sup>

There were undoubtedly accidents with horsedrawn vehicles, but they were never as common, and seldom as severe as those involving automobiles. The first reported serious automobile accident on the Molotschna roads occurred on May 1, 1911, between Halbstadt and Tiegerweide:

An automobile salesman took a buyer on a trial drive, went a distance, then turned around. A millionaire, going in the opposite direction, was driving a considerably larger vehicle. The salesman turned right to get out of the way . . . the larger automobile of the millionaire hit the smaller vehicle of the salesman on the left side, flinging the salesman and his buyer 24 feet onto the roadside, where they lay unconscious. The millionaire did not even turn to look at the injured, and left them lying there with broken limbs. He and his daughter were somewhat injured and their automobile was extensively damaged, so they left everything and started to walk back toward Halbstadt. After they had walked a short distance, a youth from Halbstadt came by, took pity on them, and took them the six werst to Halbstadt . . . When he came past the site of the accident on the way back, the injured people asked him if he would be good enough to go back to Halbstadt and ask if someone would please come and get them from the steppes. Because help was desperately required he turned back to Halbstadt a second time . . . when I arrived at the scene of the accident many people had already arrived, on foot, with horses, some on bicycles, with wagon and automobile . . . <sup>24</sup>

This was clearly a case of a hit and walk driver. It is not recorded whether the customer ever purchased an automobile, but after such an experience it is possible that he strengthened his resolve to stick to horses.

Together with private use of automobiles, public transport also developed early in the twentieth century. It was announced that a regular bus service, connecting Berdiansk, Melitopol, Halbstadt, and Gross Tokmak would start on July 28, 1908. A 15 seat omnibus was to start the service, although another had also been ordered from Italy and would soon arrive.<sup>25</sup> Presumably at least a part of the route of this bus service went through the Molotschna colony.

With the advent of World War I and the following revolution and civil war, the economic conditions in the Mennonite colonies, including the Molotschna, deteriorated. As a result the sale of the new relatively expensive automobiles likely suffered. Even in 1922 it was unusual enough to travel by motor vehicle that when Arthur Slagel, Mennonite Central Committee worker, came to Halbstadt with a small truck, this was especially mentioned. It was reported, almost with delight, that "We drove into a water filled rut, and the automobile was stuck deep in the water; it went neither forwards nor backwards . . . On the other side was a Russian village, and we

did not have to call long until half the village was on our side. A rope was applied and the automobile was out.”<sup>26</sup> The automobile in this instance brought much needed help, but this was not always the case. In the early years of the Soviet era, very few villagers in the Molotschna owned cars, but the new aristocracy, the Soviet officials, did have them. When a car was heard coming into a village, it was usually a harbinger of bad news. Somebody was unexpectedly being taken away for questioning or imprisonment.<sup>27</sup>

## The Railroad

Railroads played a significant part in the settlement and further development of many parts of North America. In Europe and also in much of European Russia, settlement had already occurred, but no doubt development was affected when railroads were built. A company headed by brothers Gerhard and Johann Wall, financed mostly by Mennonites, planned to build a railroad through the Molotschna. It was hoped that this railroad would benefit both the industry and the agricultural development of the colony.<sup>28</sup> Reaction to the proposal, however, was not all favourable. Johann Willms of Hierschau feared that with easier access, bandits and other undesirables could more easily come into the area, a concern which was certainly borne out by subsequent events.<sup>29</sup>

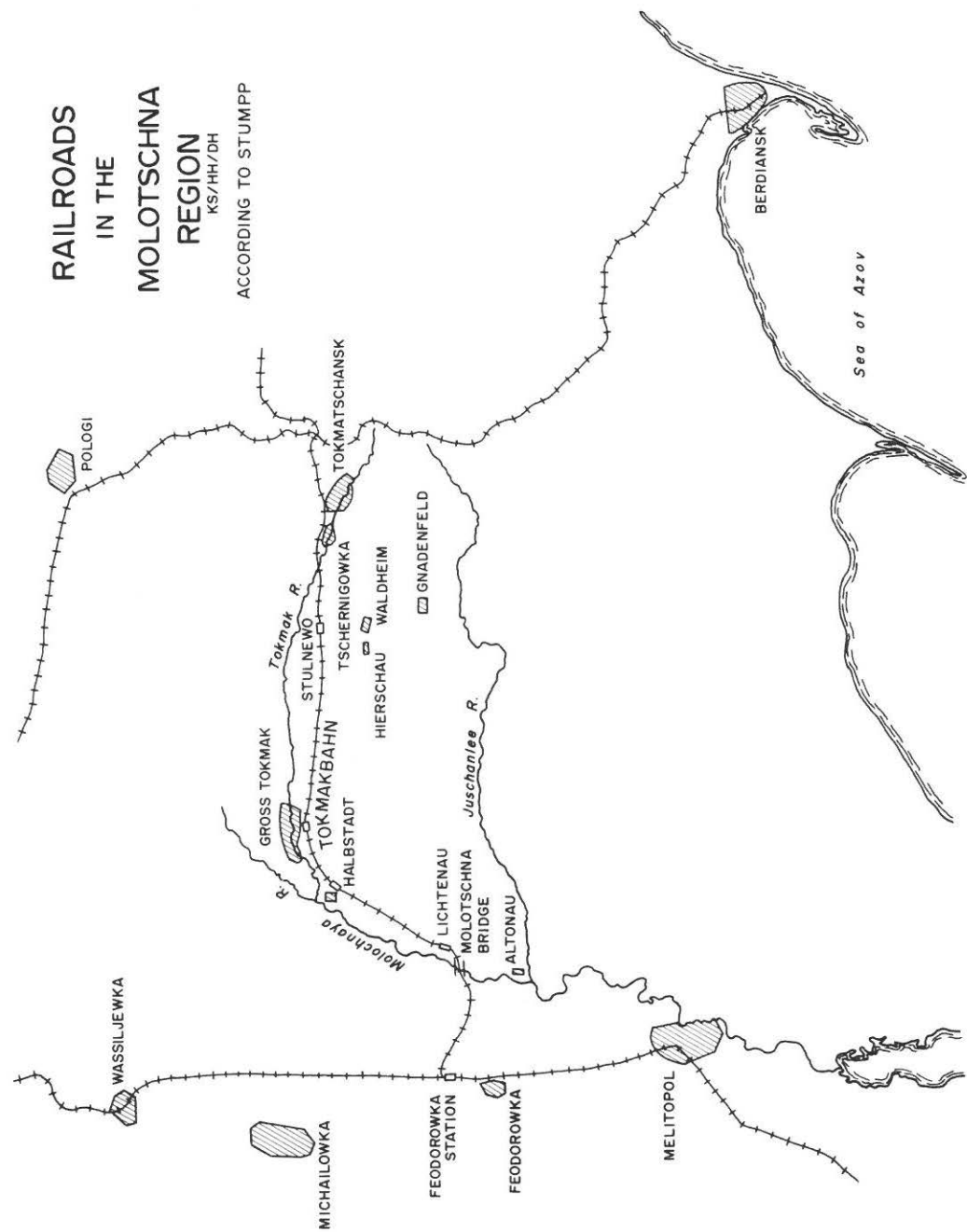
A telegram arrived from St. Petersburg informing the brothers Wall that the project had been accepted by the appropriate commission on June 8, 1910. Construction began soon thereafter.<sup>30</sup> The railroad ran from the station Zarekonstantinowka on the Mariupol line westward through the northern part of the Molotschna to Gross Tomak and Halbstadt, then along the line of villages southwest to Lichtenau. It crossed the Molotschnaya River via the Molotschna *Bruecke* (bridge) to reach the station Feodorowka on the southern line. Work on what was known as the “*Tokmakbahn*” (Tokmak Railroad) proceeded rapidly, with track being laid first on the eastern end. When sections were completed trains brought in supplies for the remaining sections.<sup>31</sup>

Construction of the rail bed required a considerable amount of sand, so when a ten dessiatine section of land which had excellent sand was discovered near Landskrone, a spur line was built to reach it. The upper layer of earth was taken away by workers with one-horse wagons, then a huge dredge picked up the sand in large buckets and poured it into waiting railroad cars. Because of this spectacle, Landskrone became a minor tourist attraction; school groups would go on outings to watch the machines in action, and certainly the children of neighbouring Hierschau were often

# RAILROADS IN THE MOLOTSCHNA REGION

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ACCORDING TO STUMPP



fascinated by all the activity.<sup>32</sup> Everyone seems to have benefited. A news report concluded, "For the company it is a productive sand pit, for the people of Landskrone it is to be a golden pit. One speaks of 15,000 rubles per dessiatine."<sup>33</sup> When the project was finished the tracks of the spur line were removed, and the dredge was sent back to Germany. The resultant gigantic sand pit was later used by the young people of Landskrone for picnics.<sup>34</sup>

Work progressed well, and by July, 1913, rails had been laid up to the station in Lichtenau. Trains passed Halbstadt up to five times a day with supplies. One sour note during construction was a strike by 15 workers in Halbstadt, who demanded that even those who were willing to work should also join them. They were arrested and taken to Gross Tokmak.<sup>35</sup> Eventual total cost of building the railroad was thought to be 50,000 to 60,000 rubles per werst.<sup>36</sup>

Construction was completed and trains began their scheduled runs on December 20, 1913, with two daily trains in each direction. Train No. 4, heading east, took a total of 11 hours, 20 minutes, to complete its run from Feodorowka to Zarekonstantinowka. It left the Lichtenau station at 11:40 A.M., and after stops at Halbstadt and Gross Tokmak, pulled into Waldheim (actually Stulnewo, a few werst from Waldheim) at 3:30 P.M. Whenever it was impossible for any of the trains to complete their schedules, it was promised that notices would be posted in the stations well in advance.<sup>37</sup>

The railroad, like all other new ventures, had its good and bad moments. A correspondent waxed eloquent about the beautiful vista to be seen from the Molotschna *Bruecke*, including the row of villages visible both to the right and to the left.<sup>38</sup> Those living close to the station in Halbstadt considered their proximity to be a mixed blessing, since they received many houseguests. It was noted, perhaps with a hint of resignation, that "Itinerant preachers are often guests, but it must be remembered that they are not paid much, and have families to support."<sup>39</sup>

An accident was reported just about one month after the train service began. A Russian farmer, perhaps slightly under the influence of alcohol, was going to pick up his wife from the hospital in Ohrloff. For some reason he tried to cross the railroad embankment, when unfortunately his sleigh runners got stuck on the tracks. He tried to unhitch his team, but before this was completed, a locomotive on its way to Lichtenau was upon him. In the resulting collision one horse was killed, the other injured. The farmer survived, the locomotive was derailed, and 15 fathoms of track was damaged. All railroad traffic between Feodorowka and Halbstadt was stopped for one day and two nights until the track was repaired.<sup>40</sup>



Between Gross Tokmak and Stulnewo the track ran between the two most northern rows of villages in the Molotschna. It was about six werst north of Hierschau, close enough to clearly hear the trains come and go. The station commonly used by the people of Hierschau was Stulnewo. The farmers hauled their grain to that station by wagon, and from there it was transported by train to the various markets.<sup>41</sup>

But the six werst distance from the railroad had other consequences for the people of Hierschau. During the civil war, both Red and the White armies had armoured trains, which included cannons mounted on the railway cars. In the summer of 1920, when the Red Army occupied part of the region, armoured trains patrolled the tracks of the Tokmak Railroad. The villages still occupied by the opposing White Army were bombarded; any sign of smoke from a chimney would send shells arching across the countryside. Hierschau was one of the villages bombarded. While no one was killed, one shell exploded on the edge of the Sperling *Kleinwirtschaft*, wounding all five members of the family, some seriously.<sup>42</sup> Waldheim was also shelled in July 1920, and Peter Toews, teacher, and his wife Aganetha were killed when a shell exploded right in front of them.<sup>43</sup>

Later in the 1920s, the railroad was the common mode of travel for emigration from the Molotschna to Canada. With large groups of travellers leaving at one time, the long line of train cars, the traffic jams of wagons, the piles of baggage and the sad, though determined farewells, will undoubtedly be etched on the memories of many people. The stations at Lichtenau, Halbstadt and Stulnewo were the places where many friends and relatives parted ways, never to see each other again.

A similar, though less voluntary exodus occurred in the autumn of 1941. The German invasion of the Soviet Union began June 22, 1941, and with rapidly advancing German armies the Soviet policy was to move as many people as possible further east. So it was that in September the people of the Molotschna were ordered to the various stations along the Tokmak Railroad — Lichtenau, Halbstadt, Stulnewo. It was the misfortune of some to live near stations where evacuation was completed. Further east down the line at Stulnewo, where about 7,000 people were gathered, the Soviets simply did not have the time to complete the arrangements. This group of people was overrun by the advancing German and Rumanian troops, and returned to their villages after the front passed through the region. The people of Hierschau were in this group and were therefore spared the rigours of resettlement in the eastern



Departure for Canada from the Lichtenau Station in 1924

reaches of the Soviet Union, at least for a time.<sup>44</sup>

### Newspapers

Travel was, however, not the only method of communication in the Molotschna. With compulsory schooling most adults could read, so newspapers were popular. *Unterhaltungsblatt*, printed in Odessa in the mid-nineteenth century, was a publication for and about the German colonies in South Russia. It carried articles discussing a wide variety of agricultural subjects, and regularly quoted grain and other commodity prices. J. Wall of Hierschau was listed as a subscriber to this paper in January, 1851.<sup>45</sup> Since he was the only subscriber in the village, it is quite possible that the paper was passed from one farmer to the other if there were valuable articles in it.

The Nebraska *Ansiedler* began publication in 1878, then the name changed to *Mennonitische Rundschau* two years later. This publication from North America was widely read in the Molotschna, so much so, that people often used its pages as a method of communicating with friends and relatives. Hierschauer were also among its readers, as witnessed by the list of subscribers, which in 1884 included Kornelius Goertzen of Hierschau.<sup>46</sup> Again he was the only subscriber in the village, possibly also passing the

paper from person to person when he had finished with it. Cost of the monthly publication in Russia at that time was one ruble per year, which was doubled to two rubles in 1899 because of the increased size and the proposed weekly publication.<sup>47</sup>

At the turn of the century, publication of German newspapers within Russia was becoming increasingly difficult. When Jakob and Abraham Kroeker began publishing *Friedensstimme* in 1903, they first had it printed in Berlin, although they lived in the Crimea. Finally in 1906, the editors moved to Halbstadt and switched publication to this locale as well. By 1908, *Friedensstimme* was published twice a week, and in 1913, circulation had risen to 5,800.<sup>48</sup> Although this was a Mennonite Brethren paper, general news items from all the Mennonite colonies, including the Molotschna and Hierschau, were included. How important this paper became in the life of the colonies can be judged by its frequency of publication and the wide variety and volume of advertising that was carried. Schools advertised for students, farmers offered their *Vollwirtschaften* for sale, Opels were extolled, motors were described, and all types of new farm machinery were praised. In 1914 there were apparently repeated difficulties with the delivery of *Friedensstimme* in the Gnadenfeld *Wolost*. To prevent late arrival, special arrangements were made to deliver Waldheim and Hierschau copies through the Waldheim station. It was announced that copies of *Friedensstimme* could be obtained on the day of printing, Tuesday and Friday evening, after the arrival of the train, at the store of Lohrenz and Reimer.<sup>49</sup>

## The Mail

The mail service in the Molotschna appears to have been under local *Wolost* jurisdiction. Mail arrived at the *Wolost* headquarters, Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld, then was delivered to the villages twice a week.<sup>50</sup> Hermann Bekker, commonly known as "Post Bekker," took the job as *Wolostpost* for Gnadenfeld in 1890, and held this position for 29 years. He was, according to a report, true and conscientious under any weather conditions, never lost his way and was never robbed. Young and old in the villages knew him. In 1919 he had to give up his position because of poor health.<sup>51</sup> Herman Bekker must have, in his long career, delivered mail to Hierschau twice a week.

But, partly because of scheduling, and partly because of penny pinching administration, the mail service in the Molotschna was not always praised. Mail delivery in the Gnadenfeld district was Monday and Thursday, but the *Friedensstimme* was printed on

Tuesday and Friday, so that the news was three or four days old before the paper was delivered. As mentioned previously, *Friedensstimme* then made its own arrangements for more expeditious delivery. The person who complained about newspaper service then continued, "One would think one were in another world, or back in another century . . . a letter from one region to another takes 11 to 14 days, under some circumstances longer." While handing out advice to the postal authorities, the writer also commented that mailmen should receive a decent salary, so that they could live without special postal charges, which, at least in the Halbstadt *Wolost*, seem to have constituted part of their pay.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps the correspondent would have taken solace in the fact that that postal services have not markedly improved in the intervening years.

### Other Communication

Other more rapid methods of communication also became available in the Molotschna. Telegrams were sent and received, certainly by 1902.<sup>53</sup> A new telegraph line was built from Gnadenfeld to Chernigowka in 1909, passing through Konteniusfeld.<sup>54</sup>

In 1910, Wilhelm Martens of Neuhalbstadt proposed a telephone network in the Molotschna, to include all the villages of the Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld *Wolosts*. Total length of the telephone line would be 400 werst, which included some connections to neighbouring networks. Advantages of this system were thought to be considerable. There would be ready access to grain price reports, costly trips would be saved, neighbours could be warned about horse thieves, and it would be useful for other business.<sup>55</sup> He must have convinced the authorities in the Molotschna, for soon at least each village *Schulze*, including that of Hierschau, had a telephone, as did the *Wolost* headquarters.<sup>56</sup> As with all convenient inventions, there are at times also some drawbacks or complications. On May 24, 1911, Isaak Neufeld of Waldheim was almost struck by a bolt of lightning which hit the telephone near him. Fortunately the insulation around the telephone wires prevented further conflagration.<sup>57</sup>

### Conclusion

While the Mennonites originally settled on the isolated steppes of southern Russia to build a home in which they could totally control their environment, it was becoming obvious that by the turn of the century and shortly thereafter, they were taking ever larger

steps to overcome any barriers to communication with the outside world.

HEINRICH J. THIESSEN  
The Prolific Correspondent  
(1854(?)-1905)

Heinrich J. Thiessen was born in Hierschau, and proud of it! His parents were Jakob Thiessen and Margaretha Harder, both born in 1816, likely in Russia.<sup>1</sup> In 1848 or soon thereafter they moved to Hierschau with at least two children, Abraham and Aganetha. Another child, Jakob, was born into the family in Hierschau on January 24, 1852, and Heinrich was born on May 2, likely in 1854. The date of birth of Johann, another son in the family, is not known.

Heinrich went to the Hierschau village school, probably from 1861-1868. He must have enjoyed school, for he loved to reminisce about this period, and felt that the pleasant memories would remain for the rest of his life. He appreciated and followed the career of his teacher, Abraham Harder, and long remembered his fellow students. Classmates in his final year of school included Dr. Peter Goossen of Nebraska, Jakob Plett of Kamentz in Neu Samara, Klaas Regier of Nebraska, Peter Friesen of Hierschau and Peter Schroeter of Friedensruhe (later of Alexandropol?). Peter Goosen was first in class, Heinrich Thiessen second, so he must have been a fairly good student. Heinrich thought that all his classmates would agree that teacher Harder had spared no effort to make good Christians of them.<sup>2</sup>

The Jakob Thiessens were neighbours of the Engbrechts, who subsequently moved to the Crimea. Heinrich remembered Netchen (Aganetha), a daughter of the Engbrechts, but seems to have spent most of his time playing with neighbourhood boys such as Peter Reimer. Peter always cut through their yard to reach the Hierschau forest or the *Hauskagel* (a plot of land each *Wirtschaft* had near the village).

Since a fair number of Hierschauers had moved to Bruderfeld in the Crimea in the early 1860s, the Thiessens periodically went there to visit, combining these visits with those to the eldest son, Abraham, who by this time lived in the area. Heinrich augmented the friendships of youth by exchanging letters with his buddies such as Peter Unruh, although in time this slowly tapered off.

Little is known about the early adult life of Heinrich Thiessen, but it is likely that he married somewhat late. He married a widow, Mrs. Maria (David) Rempel of Halbstadt; her maiden name was Duerksen and she probably originally came from Hierschau. She had at least three, possibly four children by then. She was likely at

least ten years older than Heinrich, since one of her children was only ten years younger than her new husband. It is quite possible that the couple had no additional children of their own. The children mentioned in Heinrich's letters are:<sup>3</sup>

Justina — born December 4, 1864. She married Johann Warkentin on May 29, 1885. He became a minister. They lived in Ladekopp, and had nine children. She died May 21, 1899.

Jakob Rempel — birth date not known. Was married. Lived in Lindenau.

Son — birth date not known. Married Aganetha Eitzen. Lived in Orechow.<sup>4</sup>

Maria — born April 11, 1873. Married Heinrich Braun on May 5, 1897 and lived in Muntau. Had two children. Died May 1, 1901, having had tuberculosis for nine months.<sup>5</sup>

While none of the children may have been his own flesh and blood, Heinrich was still very interested in their daily lives, he visited them at every opportunity, and sorrowed with them when tragedy struck.

In his letters there is no indication as to his occupation, but in whatever way he was employed, it allowed him considerable time to travel and visit, particularly in the Molotschna. He was proud to have come from Hierschau, but some time before 1899 moved to Michailowka, a village 35 km. west of Gross Tokmak. Interest in his home colony and village remained unabated, perhaps was even heightened by absence.

Heinrich was obviously very interested in people and their affairs, and seemed to have a nose for news — even to the extent that he maneuvered invitations to events he was curious about. He commented, "I knew how to arrange it so that I could be present at the election of ministers of the Lichtenau church on April 10."<sup>6</sup> Whether self-appointed or an officially designated correspondent, Heinrich Thiessen was one of the most prolific reporters to the *Mennonitische Rundschau* from 1899 until 1904. During that period, at least 38 letters and reports of his were published, covering almost the whole range of human experience. He described life and death as he observed it around him, gave reports on weather and crop conditions, and even submitted official hospital reports.<sup>7</sup> He seems to have considered it as part of his job description to tell former Hierschauerers about their old home. Using the pages of the *Mennonitische Rundschau* he described the triumphs and foibles of

the villagers in considerable detail. In one report he simply went down the line of the *Wirtschaften* on each side of the street, describing the inhabitants in their turn.<sup>8</sup>

Besides the official communication through the newspapers, Heinrich also had a large private correspondence — second in importance only to a good cup of coffee! He wrote, “. . . since an extra cup of coffee is above all else . . . especially when I come home from a trip . . . I controlled my curiosity. . . . After I had honoured the exquisitely tasting brew, I opened and started to read the letters.”<sup>9</sup> That day he had received three letters from America — from his brother Jakob M. Thiessen of Mountain Lake, Minnesota, from his cousin Bernhard Thiessen of Henderson, Nebraska, and from his longtime friend, Elder Kornelius M. Wall also of Henderson.

Heinrich must have been restless, however. Perhaps he was driven to his literary efforts by poor health, but he seems to have been fit enough to consider the life of a pioneer. When *Wirtschaften* in newly established villages in the Terek were being assigned by lottery in June, 1904, he was there, this time as a participant. He was disappointed that he drew a white slip — and no *Wirtschaft*.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps it was just as well.

The last report in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* written by Heinrich J. Thiessen was dated September, 1904. He reported several large fires in the Molotschna, including a prairie fire in Hierschau, he commented on preparations for the Russo-Japanese War, and greeted a friend. There was no mention of any personal illness.<sup>11</sup> Probably shortly after September, Heinrich became ill. He must have been severely incapacitated to stop him from writing! There was no word about him until Johann Abrahams of Margenau, through a letter to the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, enquired as to what had happened.<sup>12</sup> He was answered by a brief note from Bernhard Thiessen, the cousin of Heinrich, informing the readers that the Hierschau correspondent had died, having been buried on February 14, 1905.<sup>13</sup> Another reader, Abraham Harms, of Hillsboro, eventually complained that he had waited in vain for an obituary of his “dear friend and valued correspondent” Heinrich Thiessen.<sup>14</sup> The editor promised one, but no obituary ever appeared.

Perhaps it is a cruel irony of fate, that the person who spent so much time and effort documenting the affairs of others, had no one to properly record his own life! Reading through the letters of Heinrich Thiessen, one would, however, have to agree with the evaluation of Johann Abrahams. “The reason I am writing again is



the passing away of our well loved friend, the thorough and able correspondent, Heinrich Thiessen, formerly of Hierschau. He used his gift well, and for a considerable length of time, so that I became quite fond of him, though I have probably never seen him."<sup>15</sup>

I have certainly never seen Heinrich Thiessen myself, but it would take the stone heart of a computer not to have become fond of this proud, prolific and very pleasant son of Hierschau.



## X THE SCHOOL

In 1843 the Agricultural Society, whose chairman was Johann Cornies, was given jurisdiction over the schools in the Molotschna. One gets the impression that prior to that time the main purpose of education was to teach people just enough to allow them to read the Bible. A side benefit was that those who were otherwise unemployable on the farms could make a living as teachers.<sup>1</sup> Previous administration of the schools had been under the supervision of the religious leaders, so it is not surprising that Cornies encountered some opposition to change. Despite the feeling in the community that "My son does not need to know more than I do,"<sup>2</sup> he proceeded to reform the schools with his usual vigour and thoroughness.

Teachers were upgraded, helped in part by bringing in several well-trained pedagogues from Germany, and by organizing teachers' conferences. General guidelines for instruction and school policies were published by Cornies, along with 87 suggestions for ways of improving the quality of education.<sup>3</sup> Cornies' graphic description of School "X", where everything was done in a boring and slipshod manner, and School "A", the ideal, served to illustrate the changes he had in mind.<sup>4</sup> Curriculum was standardized to include reading, writing, arithmetic, but also geography, nature study and, of course, religion. Organizationally the Molotschna was divided into six school districts, and a system of mutual inspection by teachers was instituted.<sup>5</sup> Cornies, despite having only minimal formal education himself, valued schools and teachers highly, and personally inspected many schools to be sure that the regulations were being followed. To help the educational process, new and more functional schools were built in many villages, and specific lists of required equipment were prepared.

Cornies' untimely death in 1848 left some of the educational programs unfinished, but Philip Wiebe, his son-in-law and successor as chairman of the Agricultural Society, was able to complete them. Inspection of schools was regulated, teachers' conferences became an ongoing feature, and school attendance from ages 7 to 14 became compulsory in the Molotschna.<sup>6</sup>

### The School

When Hierschau was founded in 1848, space was left in the middle of the village, south of the main street, for a school. Since elementary school education was common, and probably by then compulsory, classes were likely held in the homes until the school

could be built in 1852.<sup>7</sup> Specific plans had been drawn up by the Agricultural Society, so presumably the Hierschau structure followed these regulations. The building was of brick, rectangular in shape, and placed parallel with and close to the street. The teacher's quarters were at one end, likely the east or Waldheim end, and consisted of four fairly large rooms and a kitchen. This portion of the school was heated by a large tile oven, and was warm in winter, cool in summer.<sup>8</sup> The other end was a large classroom which could be partitioned into two sections if necessary, particularly when there were two teachers. School desks may have started off as long benches and a long table, but in later years were in sections for two students, and varied in size according to the age of the pupil.<sup>9</sup> The school yard was used as a playground, but it also had a small barn, to allow the teacher to have a few cows or horses. There was no fence around the schoolyard, and no garden on the property.

Elementary school commonly consisted of six grades, with children entering at the age of seven. At least some of the time the school at Hierschau had seven grades, although not all the students completed the last year.<sup>10</sup> Those who wished further education then transferred to the *Zentralschule* in Gnadenfeld. During the earlier years few girls went beyond elementary school, but those who did, had to go to special *Maedchenschulen* (girls' schools), since the *Zentralschulen* were for boys only.<sup>11</sup> After the onset of World War I, a number of smaller *Fortbildungsschulen* (intermediate schools) sprang up, one in Waldheim, and later also one in Landskrone.<sup>12</sup> A number of Hierschau students, boys and girls, continued their education in these schools. In the 1930s and 1940s, with increasing centralization of collective farm activities in Waldheim, only the first four grades were taught in Hierschau.<sup>13</sup> The older children then walked to Waldheim to complete their elementary school education.<sup>14</sup>

The school year began on September 1, and continued until May 1, with a week off for Christmas and New Years, and three days for Easter. The school week consisted of five and a half days, including half day on Saturday. One student definitely remembers that there were homework assignments.<sup>15</sup> The last day of school, often May 1, was *Pruefung* (examination), which, while being a form of examination, was also a talent show. The school was especially decorated for the occasion, when parents came to hear and see what the children had learned. There were demonstrations of reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as special lessons to warm the hearts of the proud parents.<sup>16</sup> In addition to *Pruefung*,

there were, certainly after the turn of the century, school district administered written examinations in Religion and German.<sup>17</sup> On April 26, 1914, for example, all students of the Gnadenfeld district (which included Hierschau), wrote these examinations in Waldheim.<sup>18</sup>

Subjects taken in Hierschau followed the general guidelines of the Molotschna schools. With gradually increasing Russification, more and more of them were taught in Russian. Students learned history, geography, arithmetic, and took both Russian and German language. Religion, including Bible stories, was always taught in German. The last hour on Friday afternoon was often reserved for choir singing.<sup>19</sup>

Discipline in school tended to be on the strict side, although there was considerable variation from teacher to teacher. David Duerksen remembers that the teacher at times threw small objects at him to wake him up from his daydreams.<sup>20</sup> One Hierschau teacher in particular, is remembered as being very strict, and also harsh in his punishment.

Look one way, and you got a line . . . look the other way and you got the second line to make a cross . . . that meant you got *Pruegel* (a spanking) . . . he used a two-foot long square ruler. . . . When he moved away there was a farewell program — but there were no tears.<sup>21</sup>

Even with less strict teachers, however, students were always expected to be polite, to greet the teacher appropriately, and take off their hats when protocol demanded it. There were no school uniforms, but the general dress code in the community regulated clothing sufficiently so that there were no problems in this regard.<sup>22</sup>

School did not only consist of work and discipline. At recess the children skipped or played running games on the school yard. Once a month, in suitable weather, the Hierschau school went on an outing, possibly to the Steinberg or to Felsenbach. A samovar of tea, with baked goods, combined to make these days a pleasant diversion.

## Teachers — The Position

Teachers in the Molotschna villages were commonly hired by the *Schulzenbott*, and therefore direct terms of employment were supervised by the *Schulze*. As well as specific wages, other privileges were often negotiated. Teachers might receive grain,

fuel to heat their rooms, and often could include their cows in the village herd. Apparently a few had the right to mow the grass on the village cemetery, for hay to feed their cattle in winter.<sup>23</sup> The vast majority of teachers in the Molotschna, prior to the turn of the century, were men. Since the *Zentralschulen*, as well as the *Paedagogische Schule* (Teachers College), had only male students, women had to have their training outside the Mennonite educational system to qualify. After a number of *Maedchenschulen* sprang up, and after the *Lehrer Seminar* (Teachers College established after World War I) became co-educational, there were some women teachers, although the majority were still men. Since there was only one, or at most two teachers in the average Molotschna village, the young graduates most often obtained positions in villages which had not been their original homes. It seems that in some years the teacher job market was fairly fluid, with considerable moving from place to place. In 1914 it was remarked that "this year many teachers are changing their positions." Hierschau was one of at least four villages still looking for someone.<sup>24</sup>

The position of the teacher in the community was, during the time when misfits or other unemployables occupied this position, not very prestigious. With increasing emphasis on school reform, and more qualified teachers available, however, they became respected, influential members of society. When the *Paedagogische Schule* was founded in Halbstadt in 1878, requiring an additional two years of education after *Zentralschule*, the time when any craftsman or apprentice could become teacher was gone forever.<sup>25</sup> Often the most educated, they were frequently elected secretary or even *Schulze* of their villages. A fair number also became ministers, and therefore had a double function and influence in their communities. This position of influence was certainly recognized by the Communist authorities when they came into power, and steps were soon taken to make certain that schools would be neutralized as centers of religious instruction and nurture. In 1923, in order to be certain that there would be a socialistic atmosphere in the schools, all teachers had to submit to an examination. Those whose position was too conservative were released. Among those who lost their jobs were 14 Mennonites.<sup>26</sup>

Hierschau teachers presumably participated in the periodic conferences which had been organized to upgrade the quality of instruction in the Molotschna. It was not uncommon for teachers to take additional courses during the summer. Daniel J. Fast, who was a teacher in Hierschau at the time, participated in a Bible School

held in the summer of 1902 on the estate of David Dick, at Apanlee.<sup>27</sup> In 1905 the Molotschna Mennonite Teachers Society was founded. It also contributed much to the paedagogical training of teachers by establishing libraries, having conferences and producing sample lessons.<sup>28</sup> At the Society meeting held on October 5, 1907, the 55 members present, as well as mentioning libraries and sample lessons, also discussed pensions, wages, aims and objectives, as well as a constitution.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately the same conferences, which initially helped the teachers to fulfill their obligations, were, after the Communist takeover, also used to institute government policies. At a teachers' conference held in Halbstadt in 1926, for example, they were warned in strong tones that they were no longer to go to church services.<sup>30</sup>

While the *Schulzenbott* hired the teachers and negotiated many of their terms of employment, much of the administrative accountability of the teacher, nonetheless, was to the *Wolost*. The *Wolost* appointed school inspectors who regularly made their rounds. Kornelius Martens, for example, when he was appointed rector of the Gnadenfeld *Zentralschule* in 1914, also became inspector of schools for the Gnadenfeld *Wolost*.<sup>31</sup> Books for the library (each school was entitled to ten rubles worth), and school supplies (23 rubles per school), were requisitioned from the School Affairs Committee of each *Wolost*.<sup>32</sup>

### Individual Teachers

When Hierschau was founded in 1848 many young families moved in, so it is not surprising that there were many school age children. In 1857, with a total population of 391, there were 97 (or 25%) in school.<sup>33</sup> Jakob Hiebert was likely the first teacher, probably beginning his career soon after the village was founded. He was 18 or 19 years of age when he started in Hierschau, and continued in that position for 12 years. It is not known, but hopefully this young, relatively inexperienced teacher had some additional help with his class of 97 students. He later moved to Waldheim, had a wife and 14 children, and became a minister. When he died in 1903 at the age of 70, his life was described as having been "work and effort, worry and heartbreak." It is hoped that the worry and heartbreak referred to the death of his wife and 11 of his children, not to his early teaching experience in Hierschau.<sup>34</sup>

Quite possibly the next teacher, who definitely taught from 1861 to 1868, but likely also after that time, was Abraham Harder. According to Heinrich J. Thiessen, who had him as teacher throughout his elementary school career, Harder was well loved by

his pupils. He tried to make good Christians of his students, forgave them their misdemeanors and seemed to have their welfare at heart. One specific episode struck in the mind of Heinrich Thiessen:

I remember very well when, with my brand new brown polished pencil box, a present from my brother-in-law, I came to school and greeted Teacher Harder in the school porch. After the usual morning greeting he took the box, praised the workmanship and the polish, and encouraged me to take good care of it. After being out of school for 32 years, I still think of Teacher Harder when I see that box.

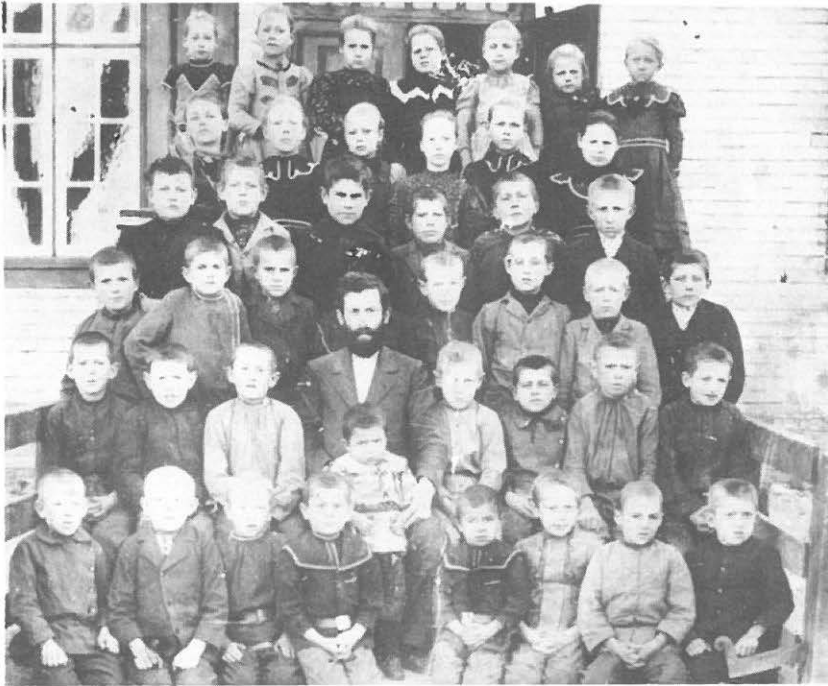
From the letter it is not certain whether Harder's wife was also a teacher in Hierschau at the time, or if she was simply a very supportive helper. Abraham Harder subsequently moved to Alexanderwohl and then to the Crimea. He was later ordained as minister by the Neukircher *Gemeinde*, and also suffered tragedy. His first wife, the one who was with him in Hierschau, died. In 1900 Heinrich Thiessen expressed his sympathy after the death of Harder's second wife.<sup>35</sup>

Jakob Duerksen, born and raised in Alexandertal, was largely a self-educated man. He was appointed teacher in Hierschau, likely in 1878. Here he taught for 12 years, then quit the teaching profession and bought a *Wirtschaft*. He was elected *Schulze* of Hierschau in 1890, then became *Oberschulze* of the Gnadenfeld *Wolost* in 1905.<sup>36</sup>

In 1890 Gerhard Plett, a teacher, came back to his own home village of Hierschau. He leased the white earth pit and operated a small store. It is not recorded whether he also taught school at the same time, although it is quite possible. He subsequently became a minister and eventually was elected *Aeltester* of the Margenau-Landskrone-Alexanderwohl *Gemeinde*.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps the first Hierschau teacher to have official teacher training was Isaak Peters. Born in Halbstadt, he completed elementary school at Schoenfeld, then *Zentralschule* and teacher training back in Halbstadt. After teaching in Marienort, Memrik, and Fischau in the Molotschna, with 11 years of teaching experience, he came to Hierschau in 1899. A group picture of the school, taken in 1902, shows Teacher Peters with his 41 pupils, of which 28 were boys, and only 13 were girls. Later in 1902 he bought a *Wirtschaft* and decided to become a farmer, but before he could start working the land he was asked to participate in the village administration, eventually being elected *Schulze*. In 1909 he sold his *Wirtschaft* in



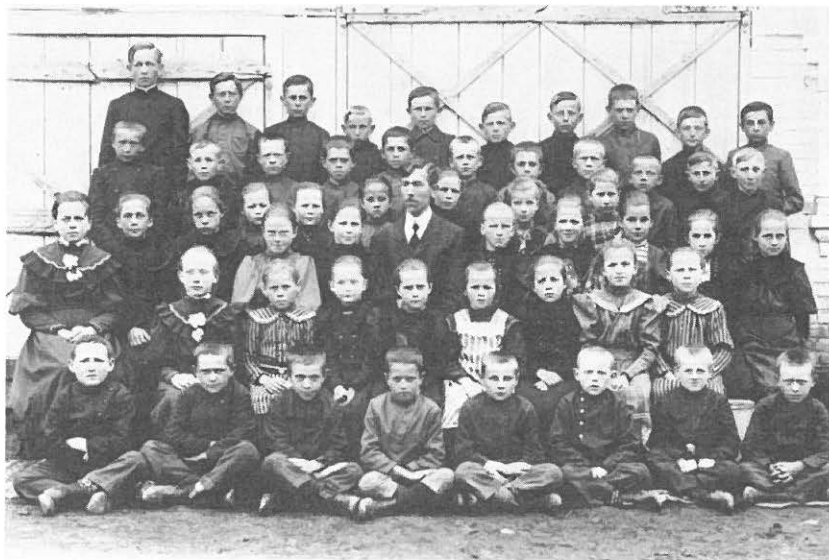


Hierschau school picture in 1902 with teacher Isaak Peters

Hierschau and moved to the estate Bergthal, to live close to his widowed mother. In 1918 he returned to the Molotschna, settling in Landskrone, then emigrated to Canada in 1925 (see capsule biography).<sup>38</sup>

Daniel J. Fast was teacher in Hierschau, likely from 1902 to 1904. Some pupils remember him as being very strict, even punishing children for what they had done on weekends, when they were not at school. A student commented, "He came into class Monday morning with a stick . . . if you did not get *Pruegel* it was a miracle."<sup>39</sup> And yet Teacher Fast undoubtedly had the good of his pupils in mind, for he took the trouble to participate in a Bible School at Apanlee in the summer of 1902. Originally from Rueckenau, he later emigrated to Canada, where he taught in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, then moved to Main Centre.<sup>40</sup>

The next teacher was Abram Bergen from Friedensdorf. He was single, and lived in the teacherage with his mother and two sisters, Anna and Helena. Enrollment in the school had risen somewhat, the picture taken about 1908 showing 53 pupils, of which 29 were boys, 24 girls. Bergen likely remained in Hierschau



School picture taken about 1908 with teacher Abram Bergen

four years, leaving about 1909.<sup>41</sup>

Gerhard Papke, the next teacher, originally came from Halbstadt. He was remembered as a nice, tall person, although he was also on the strict side.<sup>42</sup> Students had to hold the index finger perfectly straight when writing. He would tap the desk, or even the offending finger when he saw anyone writing with the finger bent. Despite the occasional "tapped" finger Maria Wall felt honoured to recite an *Abschiedsgedicht* (farewell poem) for him when he left Hierschau for further studies. After his studies he eventually moved to Leamington, Ontario, where he died in 1979.<sup>43</sup>

For some time before, but particularly at the outbreak of World War I, when Russia and Germany were at war, the government put increasing pressure on the Mennonites to abandon the use of German, particularly in the public press and the schools. Two teachers were appointed in Hierschau, one Russian, insisted on by the Czarist government, and one Mennonite.<sup>44</sup> Most subjects in school had originally been taught in German, but with this change in emphasis almost all, except Religion and of course German language, were then taught in Russian. Dietrich Unruh taught in Hierschau for a number of years during this period, about 1915 to 1918, the other teacher at the time being a Russian. A pupil remembers one of the Russian teachers, an old man, who used to duck behind the



Keep that finger straight!

teacher's desk in the classroom to have a smoke while the class was in session.<sup>45</sup>

The school in Hierschau continued to have two teachers, one often being a Russian, once even a woman, but with time two Mennonite teachers were appointed. Johann A. Goerz was born in Ohrloff, where he received his elementary and high school education. After completing teachers college he taught on a private estate, then in the Crimea, and finally in the Moloschna, eventually coming to Hierschau in 1919. School subjects were divided between the two teachers, and he taught mainly Religion and German. Johann was apparently an authority figure in the village, even during the summer holidays, and was greatly respected by everyone.<sup>46</sup> He was very kind and seemed to inspire his students to pursue their studies enthusiastically.<sup>47</sup> In 1925 the Goerz family emigrated to Canada, settling in Saskatchewan, where Johann soon began teaching again, in the Dalmeny Bible School (see capsule biography).

Franz J. Willms was the other teacher during much of the time that Johann Goerz was in Hierschau. Born in Kleefeld, he attended the local *Dorfschule*, then *Zentralschule* in Alexanderkrone. He received his certificate after completing teachers college in Halbstadt at the age of 17. He then taught in various places, including Alexanderpol, Memrik. Eventually he was appointed teacher in Hierschau, where he taught subjects such as arithmetic and geography, in which the language of instruction was Russian.<sup>48</sup> Being single, with the Goerz family occupying the teacherage, he boarded with one of the Hierschau families. Franz fell in love with, and eventually, in 1925, married a Hierschau girl who had been his pupil, Maria Neufeld.<sup>49</sup> While in Hierschau, he also became convinced of his sinful nature, was converted in 1923, and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church. In 1926 the Willms family, by then with one daughter, emigrated to Canada.<sup>50</sup> Franz first went to high school in Gretna, Manitoba, then to teachers college in Winnipeg. He taught 17 years in Manitoba, then three more years in British Columbia. He was ordained as minister in 1949 at East Chilliwack, but only two years later suffered a severe stroke. He died in 1955 of a heart attack.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusions

Education seemed to become increasingly important to the Russian Mennonites. Initially designed mainly to teach the basic rudiments of reading and arithmetic, the horizon was widened by the reforms instituted by Johann Cornies. Begun in the 1840s,

these changes continued well into the twentieth century. On January 1, 1850, there were 3,135 children in 46 village schools in the Molotschna, with an average expense per student of 1 ruble, 98 kopeks.<sup>52</sup> By the turn of the century, the Mennonite educational system was a burgeoning giant, playing a vital role in most aspects of life, both religious and secular. In 1914 the total number of Mennonite schools in Russia was over 400 primary schools, 13 boys' high schools, five girls' schools, two teacher training schools, one seminary and several schools of commerce.<sup>53</sup> In 1909 in one issue of *Friedensstimme*, seven schools advertised the time of their entrance examinations and starting dates; four were *Zentralschulen* and three were *Maedchenschulen*.<sup>54</sup> In 1914 the number of schools making announcements rose to ten, and interestingly enough, the new trend toward schools of commerce showed up, since two of them were in that category.<sup>55</sup>

While Hierschau certainly was not the hub of educational activity, some of its young people nevertheless did strive for education beyond the elementary level. Gerhard, Gertrude and Johann Willms, for example, went to the *Fortbildungsschule* in Waldheim, with the younger daughters in the family intending to go to the nursing school at Muntau.<sup>56</sup> Johann Janzen and Johann Hildebrandt chose to go to the *Fortbildungsschule* in Landskrone.<sup>57</sup> Heinrich Wiebe, Heinrich Plett and David J. Duerksen went to the *Zentralschule* in Gnadenfeld, with David Duerksen completing an extra year of college at Simferopol, in the Crimea.<sup>58</sup>

ISAAK F. PETERS  
The Teacher "Farmer"  
(1870-1951)

Isaak Franz Peters was born on December 12, 1870, in Halbstadt, Molotschna.<sup>1</sup> He was the eldest son of Franz G. Peters and Maria Fast. When Isaak was eight or nine years of age his father bought an estate in the Schoenfeld *Wolost*, Bergthal, not far from Rosenthal. Isaak therefore started his *Dorfschule* in Halbstadt, and completed it in Schoenfeld. He then returned to his old home of Halbstadt to complete his education, which included *Zentralschule* and teachers college. He took over his first school in 1888, in Marienort, Memrik, when he was not quite 18 years old.<sup>2</sup> Two years later, in 1890, he left for Fischau, Molotschna, where he taught for nine years.

During his time as teacher in Fischau, Isaak met Elisabeth Riediger of Rosenort. They were married on September 11, 1894. Three children were born into the family in Fischau.

Johannes    b. June 23, 1895

Abraham    b. December 31, 1896    d. June 1915 in the medical  
corps

Franz        b. November 29, 1898

In 1899 the family moved to Hierschau, where Isaak was the only teacher. Class size varied, but in 1902 there were 41 students, of which 28 were boys, 13 girls. Isaak was apparently quite strict, but wanted to do the right thing. His favourite subject was mathematics, although of course he taught everything. He had better than average (for a Mennonite) knowledge of the Russian language.

Isaak Peters was slightly taller than average, had dark eyes and hair. In the school picture of 1902 he has a full head of hair, although fairly early in life he became practically bald. He was partially blind, ever since birth having had very little vision in one eye, so he kept a beard because he found it difficult to shave. As a teacher he did not want to wear glasses openly, and only used them for studying at home. In later years he eventually wore them in public, presumably because of deteriorating vision.

In 1902, because of recurrent trouble with laryngitis, particularly in winter, Isaak decided to give up teaching. He purchased *Wirtschaft* No. 6,<sup>3</sup> and was about to start a new career as a farmer. He was then apparently approached by Jakob Duerksen, former

teacher, subsequently *Schulze* of Hierschau, asking him to participate in the village administration. Isaak had spent all of his early years studying, not learning to farm, so he readily accepted the offer of other work, and also the advice to hire a good Russian man to do the actual farm labour. On one occasion Isaak and his hired hand went out to the field early in the morning to make specific arrangements for the work of the day. Returning to Hierschau on his bicycle, he met a farmer just going out to his fields. This particular man had the reputation of being one of the best and hardest working farmers in Hierschau. If the teacher was coming back from his field when the good farmer was just going out, he must be excellent; his reputation was made. While not being trained as a farmer, Isaak did enjoy some aspects of *Wirtschaft* work. As a teacher he had planted a number of trees on the school yard; he now transferred this interest, planting many fruit trees in his own orchard.

Isaak continued to work in the village administration, being elected as *Schulze* of Hierschau, likely in 1905.<sup>4</sup> Jakob Duerksen moved on to become the *Oberschulze* of the whole Gnadenfeld *Wolost*.

In Hierschau a further five children were born into the family.

Isaak	b. September 8, 1900	d. August 24, 1906 of diphtheria
Maria	b. June 12, 1902	
Katharina	b. August 10, 1904	d. June, 1905
Gerhard	b. March 11, 1906	
Elisabeth	b. January 23, 1908	

Respecting his mother's wishes, Isaak sold out in Hierschau in 1909, and moved onto the family estate, Bergthal, so that he could be close to, and presumably help his widowed mother. A further five children were born at this locale.

Isaak	b. July 19, 1910	
Katharina	b. July 26, 1912	
Nikolai	b. April 8, 1915	
Selma	b. June 7, 1916	d. June 15, 1916
Petrus	b. March, 1917	Stillborn

During the unsettled times in 1918, the family fled from Bergthal to the relative safety of the Molotschna, settling in Landskrone.

While still in Hierschau, Isaak had experienced a spiritual

renewal. Now in Landskrone he put his teaching experience at the disposal of his faith and began teaching Bible classes. Since religious instruction was no longer permitted in schools, he taught students, several times a week, after school was over for the day. He also gathered the Sunday School teachers together once a week to review the lesson for the coming Sunday.

The Peters, during their stay in Landskrone, must have had fond memories of their days in the neighbouring village of Hierschau, for they often went to visit their friends in that village. They sometimes took along their daughter Katharina to visit the Pletts, Neufelds or Duerksens.

In 1925 the whole Peters family emigrated to Canada, crossing the Atlantic Ocean on the S.S. Montnairn, landing in Quebec on October 24. They then crossed half of Canada by train, arriving in Marquette, Manitoba on October 27. Here they lived in a small farm house, together with two other families, until March, 1926, when they moved to a farm they had purchased at Grande Pointe, Manitoba.

On this land, just eight miles south of Winnipeg, the Peters had a mixed farm with cattle, pigs and chickens, as well as grain. Of the 620 acres, much was swamp and bush. Despite valiant efforts, the Peters just could not pay for it, so they moved to a five acre plot just outside Steinbach in 1935. Here they grew berries and vegetables, and had chickens. In 1941 Isaak suffered a broken hip, and thereafter retired from active farm work. They remodelled an older house near the town of Steinbach, where he spent the rest of his retirement days.

While living in Grande Pointe, the Peters had first gone to church in Niverville, but then despite considerable difficulties with travel, went to the North-End Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg. Travel into Winnipeg involved taking a team of horses to the end of the streetcar line, tying up the team, then proceeding by street-car the rest of the way across the city. Later, when they had an automobile, one of the boys would have to take them, since Isaak himself did not drive. During the time that C.N. Hiebert was the pastor at the North-End church, daughter Katharina as well as Isaak and wife Elisabeth decided to join; they were baptized in June, 1932. Shortly thereafter, likely because it was not quite so far to travel, they attended the South-End Church, then meeting on Maple Street. When they moved to Steinbach, they attended the Steinbach Mennonite Brethren Church. Both in Winnipeg, and then later in Steinbach, Isaak was active in the church as *Mitarbeiter* (active lay worker), even preaching on occasion. He was church





Isaak F. Peters  
(1931)

treasurer for some time, but his particular joy in the later years was his Sunday School teaching. His good memory for, and ability to relate Bible stories was especially appreciated.

Isaak's physical condition gradually declined, and he finally died of a heart attack on September 18, 1951, at the age of 80 years. His wife Elisabeth then moved to British Columbia, where she lived in Greendale and Yarrow. On July 15 of the following

year she had a stroke, then after lying unconscious for 18 days, she died on August 2, 1952. Both Isaak and Elisabeth were buried in the Steinbach cemetery.

JOHANN A. GOERZ  
A Respected Teacher  
(1883-1957)

Johann Abraham Goerz was born on March 29, 1883, in Ohrloff, Molotschna.<sup>1</sup> He was the son of *Aeltester* Abraham Goerz who, in addition to being *Aeltster* of the Ohrloff-Halbstadt-Neukircher *Gemeinde*, served on many committees and commissions.<sup>2</sup> His mother died when he was only ten years of age, and since his father remarried, he was likely, at least for part of his life, raised by a step-mother. Johann completed *Dorfschule* and *Zentralschule* in Ohrloff, then went on to complete his teacher training in Kharkov. He began his teaching career at the age of 20.<sup>3</sup>

Johann Goerz began as a tutor on an estate at Hochfeld, then taught at the *Zentralschule* in Spat, Crimea for four years. After that he occupied teaching positions in the *Dorfschulen* of the Molotschna in Blumenort, Ladekopp, Waldheim and then in 1919 finally in Hierschau.

Johann had, in the meantime, met and married Helena Regehr of Blumenort. They were married on August 19, 1912, and the family eventually had five sons and four daughters.

Rudolph	b. August 7, 1913	Spat, Crimea
Johann	b. January 14, 1915	Blumenort
Walter	b. March 2, 1917	Ladekopp
Abraham	b. May 8, 1918	Waldheim
Katharina	b. September 8, 1920	Hierschau
Heinrich	b. October 18, 1924	Hierschau
Margaretha	b. January 24, 1927	Davidson, Sask.
Helena	b. March 2, 1930	Dalmeny, Sask.
Anne	b. April 21, 1933	Dalmeny, Sask.

In Hierschau the Goerz family lived in the teacherage, which was at one end of the school building. When they moved to Hierschau there were four children ages one to six; the family was blessed by the arrival of another two during their stay.

Since the school at that time had two classrooms, Johann shared teaching duties in Hierschau, most of the time with Franz J. Willms. Willms had the subjects such as arithmetic and geography which were taught in Russian. Johann was the instructor for Religion and German language, both of which were taught in German. As a teacher he was well organized and methodical. His systematic methods seemed to instill the knowledge successfully, since in later years when his students knew more than was expected of them, people were not surprised when they found that



Johann and Helena Goerz on their wedding day, August 19, 1912

the teacher had been Johann Goerz. He was strict, but apparently in a nice way, "so that you didn't mind."<sup>4</sup> Story time, often at the end of the day, when he would tell the students stories on almost any topic, was very popular. Johann's influence spread beyond the school, for in the village of Hierschau he was an authority figure, even during the summer holidays. According to his family he was a "typical teacher," and was nothing else except a teacher. In his later years he included his church ministry in this single-minded devotion.

Johann Goerz was a tall, thin and wiry man, somewhat stooped over. While his hair was initially dark, for most of his adult life he was partially bald, with just a fringe of hair remaining. He was short-sighted and wore thick glasses. It is not difficult to imagine how this man, through his character and appearance, projected the image of "typical teacher."

Just after the Goerz family moved to Hierschau, tragedy struck. His wife's father, Johann Regehr, and her brothers, Peter and Jakob, were murdered by the Makhnowze in Blumenort in 1919. When Johann received the bad news he came to the classroom crying, told the class what had happened, then dismissed school for the day.<sup>5</sup>

But the years spent in Hierschau were also a time of spiritual growth. During a revival in the Molotschna in 1923, both Johann and Helena were converted. It was likely teacher Goerz who confessed at a meeting held by D.M. Hofer in Waldheim, "Dear God, I am a miserable person; I wished to lead others, and have preached. Now I realize that I was a blind man leading the blind . . . I pray, be merciful to me a sinner and give me a clean heart!"<sup>6</sup> Johann later contributed to D.M. Hofer's book in which he analysed the status of the Mennonites in Russia:

We were rich in material goods, and also thought we were rich in things that moths and rust could not destroy . . . yet our Lord in his grace knew what he wanted to do with our people, and had to show love by punishing us . . . the beautiful automobiles, the horses, the wagons with springs, the clothing, yes finally the daily bread was taken from us. Has God now achieved what he wished to accomplish?

More specifically outlining his own personal struggle, he mentioned calling to God during the thunder of cannons in the Revolution, yet forgetting. Then he called to God during the time of hunger, and again forgot. Finally at the evangelistic meetings in Waldheim, God met him and through his grace confronted him.<sup>7</sup> After their conversion both Johann and Helena Goerz were baptized by Rev.

Gerhard Unruh, and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church in Waldheim.

In 1925 the Goerz family, by then with six children, decided to emigrate to Canada. They crossed the Atlantic Ocean on the same ship as the Isaak Peters family, the S.S. Montnairn, landing in Quebec on October 24. Then they continued on to Rosthern, Saskatchewan, by train.<sup>8</sup> After the initial reception they settled in Hepburn for one year, then moved to a farm near Davidson, Saskatchewan, where they stayed two years. But Johann's reputation as a teacher, and presumably his desire to continue in this field, carried on even in the new homeland.

When a new Bible School was established in Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, in 1928, Johann was asked to be the first teacher.<sup>9</sup> He accepted the position, and the first year taught all the subjects, since he was the only faculty member. The next year he was joined by missionary Franz G. Wiens, so the load was shared. A student who was at the Bible School the first two years remembers Goerz as an excellent teacher, obviously very thorough, since he taught him all the German grammar he knows even to this day.<sup>10</sup> Despite economically difficult circumstances, Johann Goerz continued teaching at the Dalmeny Bible School (actually called Tabor Bible School), also serving as principal for most of this time, for a total of 13 years.

After the stay in Dalmeny, Johann taught at a Bible School in Didsbury, Alberta, for one year, then accepted a position as Bible School teacher in Black Creek, British Columbia, in 1942. The Mennonite Brethren congregation in this community, on the north-eastern part of Vancouver Island, was somewhat isolated, and felt that it needed the inspiration that the presence of a Bible School could bring.<sup>11</sup> In the spring of 1942 the Goerz family moved to Black Creek, where Johann served as minister of the Word and as winter Bible School teacher. Initial salary was \$30.00 a month, although the congregation also helped prepare the living quarters for the family and promised additional funds at the end of the school year. By that time some of the children had left home, so only the four youngest, Heinrich, Margaretha, Helena and Anne accompanied their parents. No sooner had Johann arrived in Black Creek when he assumed the work as church secretary, a position he held for the next eight years. He mentioned having preached in Russia, but seems to have increased this ministry when he arrived in Canada; both in Saskatchewan and later in Black Creek this was an important part of his work. Being very well versed in German, he continued as part-time German language teacher even after the

Bible School in Black Creek ceased to function in about 1945. A family tragedy occurred during the time the Goerz's were in Black Creek. Son Heinrich, by then a teacher by profession, was admitted to a sanatorium in 1947 with tuberculosis. Despite medical treatment he died in 1950, at the age of 25 years.<sup>12</sup>

Johann Goerz continued his service to the church in what was described as "quiet, but blessed years" until heart trouble forced him to resign from his preaching and teaching ministries in 1956. For three months he was very sick, then he died on May 10, 1957, at the age of 74. His funeral was on May 14, the funeral oration being delivered by J.G. Thiessen of Vancouver, a former colleague of Goerz's during the Dalmeny years. Helena Goerz, Johann's wife, by that time a resident of Clearbrook, British Columbia, joined her husband in death on July 8, 1985.

Johann Goerz, tall, thin and slightly stooped, meticulous and methodical, had a very positive influence on the lives of many throughout the 50 years of his teaching career as well as in his preaching ministry.





## XI HIERSCHAU AND THE WORLD

### Home Politics

Organizationally Hierschau followed the pattern of other Menonite villages in Russia. The main agency for the regulation of political, social and economic life in the community was the *Schulzenbott*, which was an assembly consisting of one representative from each farm. A *Schulze* and a *Beisitzer* (in Hierschau it seems that there was most often only one), elected from members of the assembly, with a secretary who was appointed, and *Zehntmaenner* elected a month at a time, were the village administration. The administration met at least once a week, its decisions being subsequently ratified by the *Schulzenbott*.

Some of the officials elected or appointed to office in Hierschau are known, but there are considerable gaps in our knowledge. Table XVIII lists what information is currently available.

Hierschau was a relatively small village, with little industrial development, so its management was likely fairly straight forward. For many years its treasury benefited from the annual leasing of

TABLE XVIII  
HIERSCHAU OFFICIALS

YEAR	SCHULZE (Mayor)	BEISITZER (Assistant)	SCHREIBER (Secretary)
1858 <sup>1</sup>	Johann Siemens	Jakob Thiessen	
1874-1879 <sup>2</sup>	Kornelius Regier		
1890-1905 <sup>3</sup>	Jakob G. Duerksen		
1905-1909 <sup>4</sup>	Isaak F. Peters		
1910 <sup>5</sup>	Bernhard Plett		
1913 <sup>6</sup>	Kornelius Siemens		
During W.W.I and the Revolution <sup>7</sup>	Jakob Willms	Johann Stobbe	
1920s <sup>8</sup>	Johann Neufeld		
1924-1925	Jakob Willms		Aron Wall
1926 <sup>9</sup>			Aron Wall
1942 <sup>10</sup>	Kornelius Boschmann	Gerhard Willms	

the *Weisseerdegrube*, therefore finances should have presented no particular problems.

Johann Siemens was one of the original settlers in Hierschau, and was listed as *Schulze* in 1858. He probably held that position during the early developmental years and likely continued well beyond 1858. The 1860s and early 1870s must have been difficult for the *Schulze*, this being the time of the land dispute. According to Heinrich J. Thiessen, there was considerable quarreling<sup>11</sup> between the *Vollwirten* and those without land, which the well experienced mayor (could have been Johann Siemens) was not able to resolve.

In 1874 the bright 29 year old Kornelius Regier was elected as *Schulze*, and despite misgivings to the contrary by some of the older inhabitants, was able to settle the situation. Young and old alike soon came to respect Kornelius. He not only knew how to regulate the affairs of the village, but also became very popular. He loved to stop and talk to people; no one was too insignificant to attract his attention. When his younger brothers Isaak and Gerhard emigrated to America in 1878, he accompanied them to the train station in Michailowka. He told them not to be so sad, since he would follow them in a year. Those who heard the remark laughed, for everyone knew how popular Kornelius was. Surely he was secure and happy in Hierschau! To everyone's surprise, after a year Kornelius did sell his property in Hierschau, and followed his brothers to America. There he settled in York County, Nebraska, and came to own a section of land and a very nice garden. Eventually, after a five-week illness, he became very weak, and died on September 30, 1902, at the age of 56 years.<sup>12</sup>

The next known *Schulze* of Hierschau was Jakob G. Duerksen. Born in Alexandertal, he first moved to Hierschau when he was appointed teacher in 1878 at the age of 18. After teaching for 12 years he quit that position and bought a *Wirtschaft*. He was elected *Schulze* of Hierschau at about that time, in 1890. Village administration during his term of office appears to have run rather smoothly, giving Jakob enough time to not only be *Schulze* and work his *Wirtschaft*, but also to serve as *Waisenaeltester* (advocate for orphans). His fellow village mayors must have thought he was capable, since he was elected *Oberschulze* of the Gnadenfeld district to follow his brother Gerhard Duerksen in that position in 1905.<sup>13</sup> Giving up his position as Hierschau *Schulze*, he put much time and effort into his work as *Oberschulze*, spending at least two days a week at the *Wolost* offices in Gnadenfeld. Jakob Duerksen continued in his position as *Oberschulze* until 1915 or 1916, retiring

from all active work because of poor health. He died in Hierschau on May 22, 1922, after a lengthy illness (see capsule biography for more details).

Isaak F. Peters followed Jakob Duerksen as *Schulze* of Hierschau, Bernhard Plett likely succeeding him when he moved away in 1909. Kornelius Siemens was listed as mayor in 1913, with Jakob Willms being elected and continuing in that position during most of the war and revolutionary period.

Jakob Willms was born in Ladekopp in 1878, presumably had his primary education there, then spent three years in the *Forstei* in the Crimea. He married Helena Janzen, also of Ladekopp, and started to raise a family in his home village. In 1909 they moved to Hierschau, where Jakob purchased *Wirtschaft* No. 6.<sup>14</sup> Likely elected *Schulze* late 1913 or early 1914, Jakob Willms had the dubious privilege of being the first to be notified in the village, by the policemen, that war had broken out between Russia and Germany in 1914. *Schulzenbott* meetings were held in the Willms' *Sommer Stube*, called together by passing a note from farmer to farmer. Here the council discussed the appointment and salary of the teacher and the cowherd, debated the management of the village bull, and decided whether or not to repair the bridges. During the difficult times of the war and the following civil strife, it must have been a trying experience to be the senior official of the village. With the Communist takeover, Jakob Willms was relieved of his position, a party member being appointed, but later in the 1920s he likely was elected mayor again. The whole family left for Canada in 1925, son Jakob arriving there that year. The rest of the family was delayed because of trachoma (an eye disease), finally reaching Canada via Mexico in 1926. Jakob Willms died on April 7, 1932, in Pincher Creek, Alberta.<sup>15</sup>

## Beyond Hierschau

Aside from Jakob Duerksen, *Oberschulze* of Gnadenfeld *Wolost*, and Gerhard Plett, *Aeltester* of the Margenau-Landskrone-Alexanderwohl *Gemeinde*, most Hierschau citizens had only limited direct contact with the world outside of the Mennonite Commonwealth. That is not to say, however, that events in Russia and the world beyond had no impact on Hierschau.

Originally the Mennonite colonies dealt mainly with the *Fuersorgekomitee*, after 1828 based in Odessa. In 1871 the *Fuersorgekomitee* was dissolved, so thereafter they had to negotiate with their local provincial administrations. The Molotschna was in Taurida, a province which included territory north of the Sea of

Azov as well as the entire Crimea. The capital city of Taurida was Simferopol. In the first official Russian census of 1897 the population of the whole country was 129 million, of which over 80% were peasants. Taurida, with an area of 63,553.5 square kilometers, had a population of almost one and a half million. Just before World War I there were 36,000 Mennonites in Taurida, in a total of about 90 villages and many private estates, owning approximately 3,737,000 hectares of land.<sup>16</sup>

The population of Hierschau gradually increased with time, although the number of farms and yards remained static. Any increase in population must have occurred by increase in family size, or by people doubling up by living in the *Nebenhaus* or other such facilities. By 1915 there were 427 Mennonites living in Hierschau, occupying 30 *Vollwirtschaften* and 24 *Kleinwirtschaften*, with a total land area of 2,309 dessiatines.<sup>17</sup>

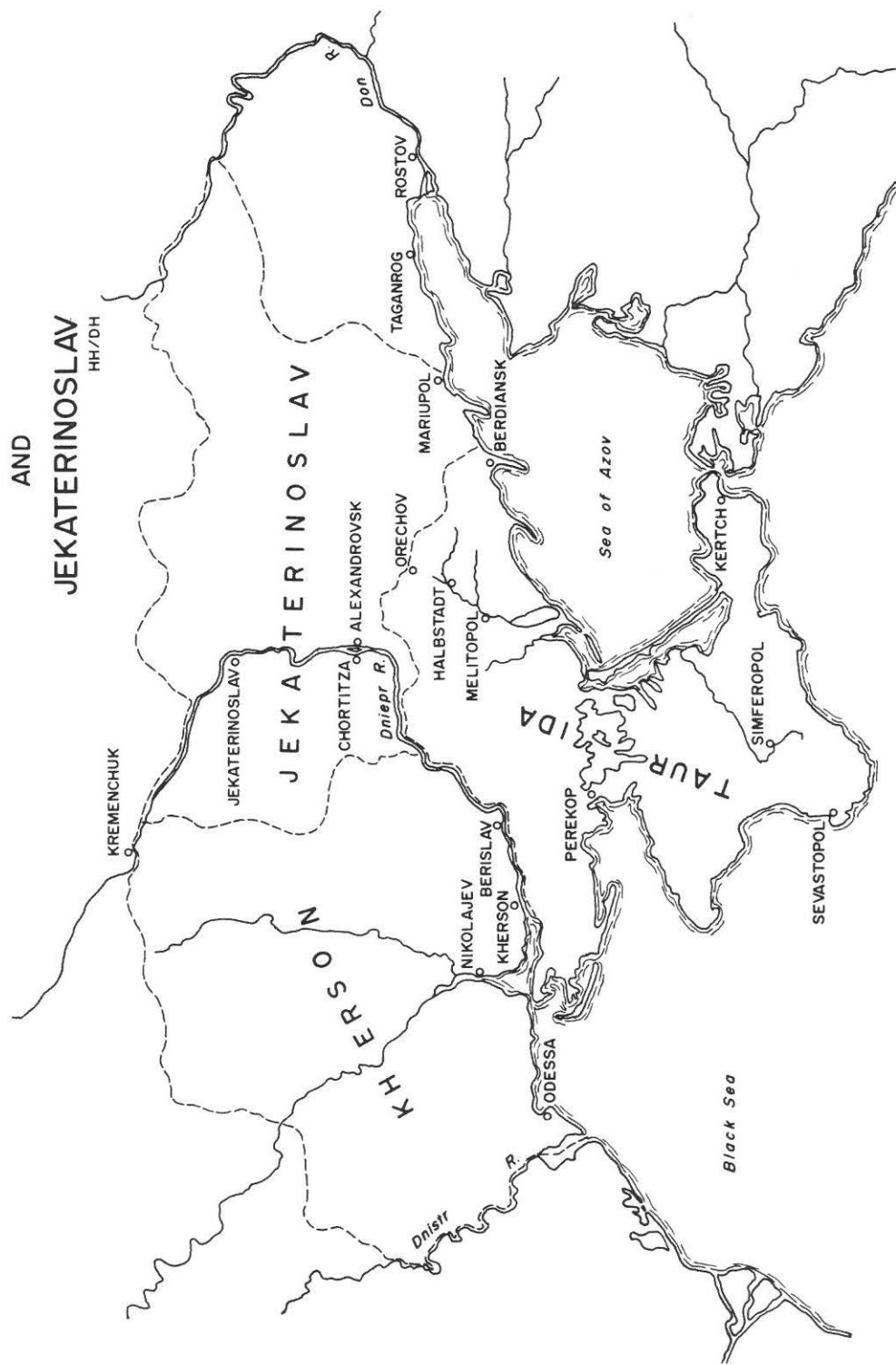
Beyond dealings with local provincial administrations, the Mennonites were increasingly affected by the general trends in Russia, as well as by specific changes in legislation which altered their own peculiar status. Many of the legislative changes focused on the relationship of the Mennonites to Russian military efforts, most specifically on the non-resistant status.

## The Forstei

After the defeat of the Crimean War, strenuous efforts were made to improve the Russian military. This involved reforms in the education and training of new recruits, but also a widening of conscription to make it universal. A new law was published on January 1, 1874, which allowed no exemptions or substitutes for military service, although Mennonites were assured that they could fulfill the service by non-combatant duties in hospitals or in military workshops. Eventually a scheme was worked out whereby Mennonite young men could serve in special closed *Forstei* units. The Mennonites agreed to bear the costs of maintaining the workers, and would also build the barracks. The program was instituted in 1880, although the construction of the facilities did not begin until the following year.<sup>18</sup> A report published in January of 1881 outlines the initial steps taken:

Six barracks are to be built for our youths — four this year and two the next. Each *Forstei* is given 200 dessiatines land by the Crown on which to work. Officials have also stipulated what type of clothing is to be worn — grey suit, green collar, yellow buttons. There

# TAURIDA, KHERSON AND JEKATERINOSLAV HH/DH



must be an overseer, a forester, a doctor and a minister. All costs are to be borne by the Mennonites, and this will likely be half a million rubles.<sup>19</sup>

Eventually nine forestry stations were established, three in Kherson province, three in Taurida, two in Jekaterinoslaw and one in Siberia. One mobile detachment was formed to fight the phyloxera pest in the vineyards of the Crimea.<sup>20</sup>

Not all youths were necessarily required to serve in the *Forstei*, although all were theoretically eligible. To decide who would go, a system of casting lots was devised. A report from 1884 relates:

On November 25, in Halbstadt, the annual casting of lots among youths regarding the obligatory state service was held. Before the lots were cast *Aeltester* A. Goerz had a very up-building sermon in the local church. Then the casting of lots began. Of the youths, 62 were chosen . . . among the 62 youths there are four with teacher certificates, who may serve their time as teachers, a striking proof that every drop of education has its value . . .<sup>21</sup>

In 1881 a total of 123 youths were chosen to begin their four-year period of service. Among these initial recruits was Kornelius Julius Plett,<sup>22</sup> from Hierschau, 22 year old son of Julius Plett, one of the original settlers. He presumably served his four year term, then returned to Hierschau, married in 1886 and settled down to *Wirtschaft* life. Peter Sperling was also specifically listed as being away at *Forstei* camp in 1903,<sup>23</sup> although many others also served throughout the years.

The total number of youths drafted annually tended gradually to increase over the years. Initially somewhat over one hundred, by 1907 there were 348 new recruits, with a total of 1,087 serving at the time.<sup>24</sup> Between 1881 and 1906 altogether 4,403 men had been drafted, at a total cost to the Mennonite community of 2,115,604 rubles.<sup>25</sup> These expenses were met by assessing a property tax and a head tax of 50 kopecks per person.<sup>26</sup>

With the outbreak of World War I the number of camps as well as the number of men drafted increased dramatically, most young men being involved in alternate service of some kind.

## Wars and Rumours of Wars

Russia and Turkey were at war intermittently for over 150 years. Russia looked south with a covetous eye at some of the territory, but particularly at the narrow passage of water, guarded by

Istanbul, which connects the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. But this narrow passage, the Bosphorous and the Dardanelles, was under Turkish control. The Crimean War of 1853-1856, previously described in Chapter V, was one conflict in this long series. Relations between Russia and Turkey again became strained in the 1870s with the political situation in the Balkan states being the specific point of contention.<sup>27</sup> Russia declared war on April 12, 1877.

A government call for transport brought agreement by the Gnadenfeld district to provide 20 teams of horses. The Halbstadt *Wolost* decided to equip a 100 bed hospital to care for the wounded.<sup>28</sup> A letter assuring the Czar of full support and co-operation by the Mennonites was sent to the court.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the fact that the Russian army was still in a transition phase after the Crimean War, it was able to cross the Danube and eventually capture the Turkish stronghold of Plevna. The Turkish navy was also defeated, through the use of steam launches armed with torpedoes. An armistice was followed by the Treaty of Stefano to bring the war to a close. In October, 1878, Mennonite representatives travelled to Simferopol to offer the Czar congratulations for Russian achievements during the war.

Russia also had ambitions for further expansion in the Far East. Here a clash with the expanding Japanese influence was inevitable. With conflicting interests, particularly in Manchuria, Korea and the Liaotung Peninsula, it is not surprising that war eventually broke out. On February 8, 1904, a Japanese fleet, without warning, attacked Russian ships at Port Arthur. Hostilities began, both at sea and on land. To most people Russia seemed to be much more powerful, and expected her to win the war easily. But this was not to be. Russian men and supplies had to be shipped across the wide expanse of Siberia before they entered the field of conflict. Additional ships for the fleet had to sail from the Baltic, all the way around Africa, before they could reach the combat zone.

Mennonites, by this time involved in alternative service to the state, tried to provide additional help to their homeland in this very trying struggle. Hundreds of thousands of rubles and trainloads of products, warm clothing, linen and bandages were sent. Dozens of young men, almost all of whom had already served in the *Forstei*, volunteered as *Sanitaeter* (medical orderlies).<sup>30</sup> H. Friesen reported back from the front on January 6, 1905:

Thank you in the name of suffering soldiers here in the

Far East . . . for those who have participated in the God pleasing work, for the sending of 1,131 warm shirts. Today . . . we received the shipment of 12 bales . . . another five German (Mennonite) medical workers have arrived at our military hospital. . . . We have accepted 1,088 wounded and sick, released 900, with 19 having died. At the front we now have the calm before the storm. Temperature is from minus 19 to minus 32 degrees.<sup>31</sup>

The Mennonites also provided help on the home front, distributing money and other support among the wives of soldiers in the surrounding Russian villages.<sup>32</sup>

The war was not going well. The Russian army, at first badly outnumbered, was forced to retreat in Manchuria. The best troops were kept in European Russia because of increasing unrest in the country, so that even when enough reinforcements eventually arrived, the fighting quality of the men was poor. The army was decisively defeated at the Battle of Mukden in 1905. The fleet fared no better, with the newly arrived Baltic fleet being nearly annihilated in the Battle of Tsushima Straits, also in 1905. The Mennonite response of "We cry and pray to God asking for peace"<sup>33</sup> came to fruition when the Treaty of Portsmouth ended the conflict later in 1905. Russia obtained moderate terms, although withdrawing from much of the disputed territory. This war, never having been popular among the ordinary citizens, shook the foundations of the Czarist regime, and certainly shocked the world.<sup>34</sup>

## On the Brink

Nicholas II, Czar of the Russian Empire, was a good husband. Historians find it difficult to say anything else good about him. While having personal charm and a certain disarming simplicity, he appeared to be politically naive; he often took advice from the wrong people. There were at first extremely able ministers in the government, such as Prime Minister Witte, but Nicholas chose to listen to his palace commandant, or even worse, to his wife's favourite holy man. Later in his reign he tended to appoint ministers who knew how to please him, although they were often without talent or even blatantly dishonest.<sup>35</sup>

Dissatisfaction with the management and outcome of the Russo-Japanese War, together with what appeared to be worsening conditions at home, gradually precipitated unrest in Russia. This took the form of strikes and riots both in cities and in the countryside, leading to full-fledged revolts in many areas. There were assassinations and riots both in St. Petersburg and Moscow, the



uprising in Moscow being quelled with particular brutality. Taurida province itself was generally speaking quite calm, but neighbouring Jekaterinoslaw and Kherson had considerable unrest. Even so, the people of Taurida, including the Mennonites of the Molotschna, were worried and not totally unaffected. The Mennonite press reported:

Political murders and murder attempts are increasing at a terrible rate in recent times. Last Sunday at 8:30 P.M. the governor of Jekaterinoslaw and General Major Sholtanowskij were murdered. . . . In Moscow . . . an attempt was made to assassinate Governor-General Admiral Dubassow, who in the previous December had quelled an attempted uprising in Moscow. . . .<sup>36</sup>

Obviously times went from bad to worse, since two months later it was reported that:

The political situation in Russia is ever more serious . . . the country has moved into anarchy and is becoming poorer . . . the general plans and policies of the government are unknown. Signs of restraint of chaos and restoration of order are not present. The actions of the ministers of the Crown show neglect in carrying out their duties and a disregard for the law of a high degree. . . .<sup>37</sup>

An example of violence during this time was described in Jusowka, Jekaterinoslaw province, where a crowd of several thousand was dispersed by two squadrons of dragoons. "From the back several shots were heard, whereupon the soldiers fired five salvos into the crowd. Many were wounded or dead . . . 18 of the agitators and 30 revolutionaries were arrested. . . ."<sup>38</sup>

Complicating the general unrest in Russia was a rising tide of nationalism by many of the minority groups. This was particularly evident in Jekaterinoslaw and Kherson provinces, where the Ukrainians, while protesting against the authoritarian rule of the Czarist regime, also dreamed of founding their own independent state.

While on a much smaller scale, there was some unrest in Taurida, also in the Molotschna Colony area. On Sunday, June 18, 1906, a meeting was held in Gross Tokmak in which various individuals agitated against the surrounding German people and in particular against large landowners.<sup>39</sup> Even closer to the serene Utopia of Hierschau, in neighbouring Waldheim, the workers of the

J.J. Neufeld factory went on strike for higher wages. It was reported that "they threatened, should other workers be hired to replace them, to demolish the factory. The owners are, as a result of this, thinking of closing down the factory for an undetermined time."<sup>40</sup> The strike must have been settled to everyone's satisfaction, however, since when six men suddenly appeared at the foundry four months later, advocating a strike, they were chased away:

Four were captured by the factory workers, taken to the village authorities and put in jail. Two men escaped. As a result of this episode, the factory, in order to maintain security for both workers and property, hired two security guards and three Cossacks for an extended period.<sup>41</sup>

It is likely this episode which is described in current Soviet literature as an uprising of the workers of the town against the owners, which was brutally crushed by the authorities.<sup>42</sup>

It was the feeling that even in the relatively calm province of Taurida, there was some breakdown of law and order. A number of robberies in the Molotschna were reported, as well as some murders. After the description of the murder of a Mrs. Klassen and her children, the reporter philosophised, "Hard was the time for our Fatherland during the war with Japan, but still harder after the peace has arrived."<sup>43</sup>

## The Duma

Most of the unrest and revolution, both in cities and countryside, was quelled by armed force. It became clear to the government, however, that agitation was widespread enough to require at least the semblance of change. Consequently a body of elected representatives, called the Duma, was established. While hardly being truly representative, it nonetheless appeared to be a step in the right direction.

The assembly of the Duma was officially opened on April 27, 1906, in the new building, the Taurida Palace, in St. Petersburg. Then the representatives went to the Georgian Throne Room in the Winter Palace. Flanked by the cabinet to his right, and the Duma to his left (significant?), with the nobility standing on the lowest three steps, the Czar delivered the speech from the throne.<sup>44</sup>

The Duma had been established to advise the government on its policies. The fact that this advice was largely ignored soon became painfully obvious. By May, a scant month after sessions began,



The Winter Palace, official winter residence of the Czar in St. Petersburg  
(photograph 1982)

*Friedensstimme* was reporting repeated confrontations between the Duma and the government, wondering if revolution might not be the end result.<sup>45</sup> The Duma's opinion on land distribution was considered by the government to be illegal, so troops were sent to occupy the chamber, the assembly being dissolved two months after its first meeting.<sup>46</sup> New elections were held in January, 1907, and with some of the more radical members of the previous assembly in jail, the results appeared to have produced a more conservative gathering. *Aeltester* Abraham Goerz (father of Hierschau teacher Johann Goerz) and Johann Isaak of Rueckenau were chosen as electors for the Duma.<sup>47</sup> But even this Duma criticized government policies, so some of its members were arrested on trumped-up charges. New terms of reference, emphasizing the country gentry and the urban rich, were used to elect the next assembly later in 1907. *Aeltester* Goerz was again chosen elector, together with Heinrich Janz of Halbstadt.<sup>48</sup> This Duma was much more to the government's liking, but despite an inclination to favour the status quo, it did make contributions which improved various aspects of life in Russia. It served its full term until 1912. A fourth Duma, also elected with the same terms of reference as the third, continued to function until 1917.<sup>49</sup>



Czar Nicholas II and his family. Almost all Mennonite homes had, among their treasured photographs, pictures of the Royal Family.

## The Czar

While dealing with government initially through the *Fuersorgekomitee*, then later through provincial officials, sometimes even contacting ministers of the crown, the Mennonites in Russia nonetheless seem to have had a special allegiance to the Czar and his family. Officials might be inefficient, cabinet ministers might even be dishonest, but if only the Czar could be informed of the situation, things would be rectified. So it was that even after the defeat of the Russians by Japan in 1905, after the disorders in city and countryside in 1906, after the repeated confrontations between the Duma and the Czar's government, an audience with the Czar was still a singularly precious moment. The report of such an audience given on November 1, 1909, seems to savour each royal detail. A total of 28 regional representatives from the Berdiansk area had an audience with the Czar in Yalta. There were 13 *Oberschulze* and 15 private individuals, including Gerhard Duerksen, former *Oberschulze* of the Gnadenfeld *Wolost*. The 28 men stood in a semicircle, facing the royal palace, as the Czar, accompanied by the Czarina, approached the group. He gave everyone a look, and spoke to many. Of the Berdiansk representatives, four men had the luck of being addressed; among these was

Gerhard Duerksen. After the Czar had spoken to Duerksen, the Czarina nodded to him in friendly fashion, then turned and left for the palace. The Czar continued down the row by himself.<sup>50</sup>

## Hierschau

Much of what transpired in the world and on the national scene appeared to effect Hierschau very little. Aside from the role that Jakob Duerksen and Gerhard Plett played in reacting to government policies, and except for the young men who participated in alternative government service, there appeared to be few waves to disturb the tranquil Hierschau waters.

Then, on August 1, 1914, the village policeman called on Jakob Willms, *Schulze* of Hierschau, to tell him that Russia and Germany were at war. A storm was brewing.

JAKOB G. DUERKSEN  
A Dedicated Politician  
(1860-1922)

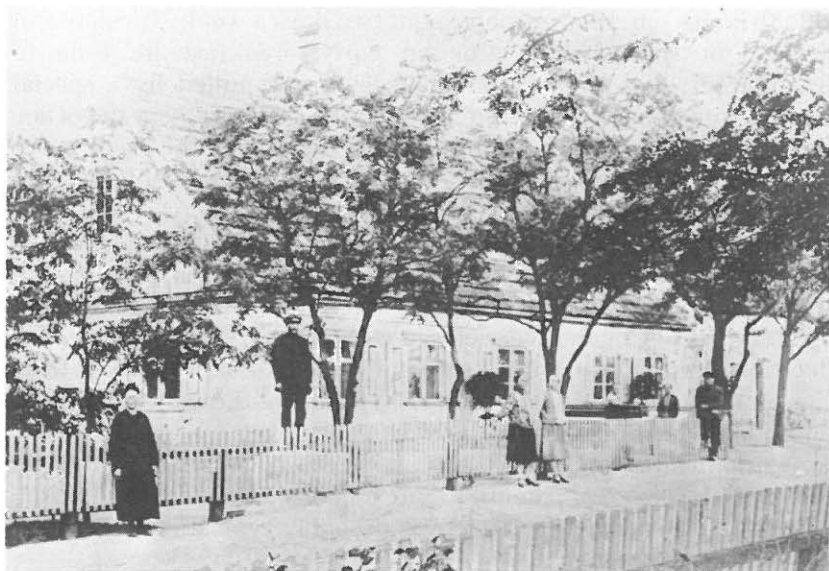
Jakob Gerhard Duerksen was born in Alexandertal, Molotschna on April 19, 1860.<sup>1</sup> His parents, Gerhard Duerksen and Anna Doerksen, had originally emigrated from Prussia in 1828.<sup>2</sup> They apparently reached their new homeland on foot, pushing and pulling a baby carriage all the way.<sup>3</sup> They had a family of six boys and one girl.

The eldest son, Gerhard, who stayed in Alexandertal, was elected *Oberschulze* of the Gnadenfeld *Wolost* in 1887. He retired from that position early in 1905 when he became seriously ill.<sup>4</sup> Another son was David, a teacher and preacher. He was a minister in the Margenau church, then became *Aeltester* of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Spat, in the Crimea.<sup>5</sup> The next son, Johann, was a farmer in Landskrone, but also a minister in the Landskrone Mennonite Church. Kornelius continued farming in Alexandertal, eventually becoming *Schulze* of that village. The second youngest in the family was Jakob.

After completing the *Dorfschule* in Alexandertal, Jakob continued his education informally on his own, mainly through much reading. His family recalls that this habit continued into later life, when he read Otto Funke, Dr. Baedeker, P.M. Friesen, as well as the *Mennonitische Rundschau*.

In 1878, at the age of 18, Jakob was appointed as teacher in Hierschau. He must have travelled back to his home village periodically, since in July, 1882, he married Elisabeth Dueckman, also of Alexandertal. The family settled in Hierschau where Jakob continued teaching. A total of ten children were born into the Duerksen family.

Anna	b. April 14, 1883	
Martin	b. June 10, 1884	d. January 22, 1887
Helena	b. February 10, 1886	
Gerhard	b. August 13, 1887	
Elisabeth	b. September 6, 1889	d. October 18, 1971 in British Columbia
Katharina	b. July 16, 1891	
Jakob	b. November 5, 1893	d. in concentration camp in U.S.S.R.
Sara	b. March 7, 1896	
Maria	b. May 8, 1898	



The Jakob Duerksen *Wirtschaft*, No. 26.

David

b. September 15, 1904

d. October 19, 1983  
in British  
Columbia<sup>6</sup>

The youngest son, David Jakob Duerksen, later emigrated to Canada, and was the source of much information for this biography, as well as for other portions of the book.

After teaching 12 years, Jakob Duerksen gave up that vocation, and purchased *Wirtschaft* No. 26 on the south side of the village street.<sup>7</sup> This is the place the family remembered as home, where most of their growing up took place. At about the same time, in 1890, Jakob was elected *Schulze* of Hierschau.

Jakob must have enjoyed working with committees and institutions, since besides being *Schulze*, he was also a *Waisenaeltester* for the district.<sup>8</sup> Likely preparing for further avenues of work, he encouraged Isaak Peters, teacher in Hierschau for three years, to come into the village administration.<sup>9</sup> When Gerhard Duerksen, Jakob's elder brother, became seriously ill in January of 1905, Jakob replaced him as *Oberschulze* of the Gnadenfeld *Wolost*. Isaak Peters then replaced Jakob as *Schulze* of Hierschau.

The office of the Gnadenfeld *Wolost* was in the village of Gnadenfeld, so Jakob had to travel a considerable amount to be

able to do his job. He routinely spent two days a week, Tuesday and Friday, in the office. After an early breakfast he rode to Gnadenfeld on a special *Verdeckfederwagen* pulled by a special team of horses supplied by the *Wolost*. After a long day at the office he returned home late at night. During the rest of the week there were frequent visitors to the home regarding items of business which just could not wait until the next office day. Officials from other villages would seek advice or ask for decisions. The youngest son, David, did not hear what went on in these meetings, commonly held in the *Grosse Stube*, but he was impressed by the fact that all meetings began and were closed with prayer. On their knees the decision-makers asked for God's guidance. Russian officials from the provincial government also visited during the war looking for additional contributions to the war effort.

Periodically reports of *Wolost* meetings were published in *Friedensstimme*. A meeting presumably chaired by Jakob Duerksen on August 20, 1911, was probably typical of the type of business transacted.<sup>10</sup>

1. Heinrich Unrau and Aron Rempel were elected to represent Gnadenfeld at a meeting of the regional Land Commission.
2. Settlers in Orenburg were allowed to borrow money from Gnadenfeld for 3 years at 6%, up to 200 rubles per *Wirtschaft*.
3. Three other villages from the Busuluk district were given permission to borrow money, also at 6%.
4. Student Heinrich Warkentin of Waldheim was granted an interest free loan of 400 rubles per year for five years, to be repaid when he completed his education.
5. A request for an annual subsidy by the *Zentralschule* in Lugowsk, as well as a request for aid and upgrading in the status of the Gnadenfeld *Maedchenschule* was rejected.
6. Johann Penner, a member of the administration had died, so others were elected to fill his various positions.

As *Oberschulze*, Jakob Duerksen attended meetings discussing the wider Mennonite community, such as sessions held on May 5 and 6, 1910, when three *Oberschulze* discussed the *Forstei*.<sup>11</sup> At the time of increasing international tension just after the outbreak





Jacob and Elisabeth Duerksen

of World War I, he was at a meeting of Molotschna church leaders where he signed a declaration petitioning prayer for Czar and country.<sup>12</sup> He obviously had a busy life, filled with many and varied responsibilities. As seen on the picture of Jakob and his wife

Elisabeth, probably taken toward the end of his career, his work was well appreciated. With pride he wears four medals, likely received for service to region and country.

In 1915 and 1916, Jakob became increasingly disabled, asthma making it ever more difficult for him to do any physical work. He resigned from his position as *Oberschulze*, probably in 1916. After the war and during the following civil strife, his health slowly continued to deteriorate.

While Jakob Duerksen was not directly involved in church work, he and his family nevertheless did have a very deep religious commitment. Traditionally the family belonged to the Margenau-Landskrone-Alexanderwohl congregation, although several daughters joined the Mennonite Brethren Church in Waldheim. With declining health, Jakob was no longer able to leave his home, and among his faithful visitors was Kornelius Boschmann, the prophet-like Mennonite Brethren minister.

After a prolonged illness, Jakob Duerksen died in Hierschau on May 22, 1922, at the age of 62 years. Kornelius Boschmann, faithful friend, and *Aeltester* Gerhard Plett, long-time spiritual leader, spoke at the funeral of this capable and dedicated Mennonite politician.

### BOOK 3. DISASTER IN UTOPIA

For the Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia, the beginning of the end came with the outbreak of World War I. The Mennonites, as loyal citizens of their chosen Fatherland, participated in the war effort in whatever ways their consciences allowed. Even so, they were included in the general reaction against all things German which swept through Russia.

With the breakdown of the Czar's government, there was a brief flicker of hope when German troops eventually occupied the Ukraine in April, 1918, restoring law and order. Unfortunately for the Mennonites, world events intervened. When the Treaty of Versailles was signed in November of 1918, to end the war, the German troops were withdrawn. The Mennonites had a difficult choice to make, and most came down on the side of *Selbstschutz* (self-protection). Combined Makhno and Red Army forces, however, forced the collapse of the defensive army. Intermittent periods of anarchy and terror were the lot of most Mennonite communities for a number of years, culminating in the battles between the White and Red Armies, often on the fertile fields of the Molotschna. After the final defeat and retreat of the Whites from the area in the autumn of 1920, the Mennonites were forced to come to an uneasy truce with the ruling Communist government.

Partially due to circumstances, but also in part precipitated by government policy, the bread basket of Europe became depleted. A period of severe starvation followed. Mennonites were among those who were starving, and had it not been for the helping hand of the Mennonite Central Committee from America, many would have died. The crisis over, some felt that with agricultural recovery and more settled circumstances, conditions would improve significantly. Others thought that the future lay elsewhere. A substantial number of people from Hirschau were among those who emigrated to Canada in the 1920s. Those who remained soon had their hopes of returning to Utopia shattered. *Wirtschaften* were collectivized. Schools were strictly controlled. All religious activity was brutally suppressed. Inefficient, yet totally autocratic government was enforced by exorbitant taxes, jail, deportation, torture, and frequently the firing squad.

## RUSSIA AND WORLD WAR I<sup>1</sup> CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

(Dates according to the New Calendar)

Power blocks prior to World War I

Triple Alliance (Central Powers) — Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy.

Triple Entente (The Allies) — Britain, France, Russia.

June 28, 1914 — Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia.

July 28, 1914 — Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia.

July 30, 1914 — As patron and protector of Slavic states in the Balkans, Russia began general mobilization.

July 31, 1914 — German ultimatum demanding demobilization refused by Russia.

August 1, 1914 — Germany declared war on Russia.

August, 1914 — Two Russian armies advanced into East Prussia.

August 26-31, 1914 — Russian Second Army crushed by Germans in the Battle of Tannenberg, the First Army fell back in disorder.

September 1-October 3 — Russians defeated the Austrians in the Battles of Lemberg. Russia occupied Galacia, reached the Carpathian Mountains.

October 30 — Turkey entered the war on the German side, attacking Russia in the Caucasus region.

January, 1915 — Turks pushed back in the Caucasus.

February 19, 1915 — Initial British bombardment to begin the attack on the Turkish held Dardanelles.

March, 1915 — Russia resumed offensive in Galacia and took the fortress of Przemyśl.

May 2, 1915 — Combined German and Austrian forces assumed offensive on a 28-mile front. Russians abandoned Galicia, then most of Poland.

September, 1915 — Grand Duke Nicholai, uncle of the Czar, dismissed as Commander-in-Chief and transferred to the Caucasus. Nicholas II himself took the position as commander, leaving much of the government to his ministers and the Czarina in Petrograd.

October 1915 to Early 1916 — War in the Balkans, involving Britain, France, Serbia, Germany, Austria-Hungary. Austria occupied Montenegro and Albania.

June 4, 1916 — Brusilov Offensive launched by the Russians. Successful on the Austrian front, with great areas of territory occupied and thousands of prisoners taken. German reinforcements eventually turned the tide, the Russian offence was turned into a retreat.

Late 1916/early 1917 — Morale in Russia low. All transport used for war. Food shortages. Strikes.

February, 1917 — Food riots in Petrograd. Duma dissolved but continued to meet. Troops joined the revolution. Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies formed in Petrograd.

March 28, 1917 (March 15 according to the Old Calendar) — Czar forced to abdicate.

Provisional Government of liberal politicians was set up under the auspices of the Soviet. Many former Duma members included. Prince Lvov headed the cabinet.

First decree was to declare amnesty for political, military and religious prisoners, freedom of speech and press, freedom to organize trade unions and to strike.

Discipline in the Army crumbling.

May, 1917 — Re-shuffle of Provisional Government cabinet.

Soviets established in the Provinces, often with very little opposition.

July, 1917 — Kerensky became Prime Minister of the Provisional Government.

July, 1917 — Brief Russian advance, then German counter-offensive.

July, 1917 — Kerensky tried to restore order in Russia, Bolshevik leaders arrested.

September 1, 1917 — Germans continued advance and took Riga. Last engagement of old Russian Army.

Revolution in Petrograd, Red guards taking many key areas.

November 7, 1917 (October 25 according to the Old Calendar) — Winter Palace captured by the Bolsheviks. Second Soviet Congress of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers met, and accepted a list of commissars drawn up by the Bolsheviks. Lenin — chairman; Trotsky — foreign affairs.

November 8, 1917 — Lenin announced that he wanted peace.

German-Russian peace negotiations began at Brest Litovsk.

January, 1918 — Duly elected Constitutional Assembly, with only 175 of the 707 seats held by Bolsheviks, was forcefully dissolved by the Bolsheviks.

January 9, 1918 — Ukrainian Central Council announced complete independence of the Ukraine and began negotiating with the Central Powers.

March 3, 1918 — Russia signed terms of peace with Germany. Lost the Baltic States, Poland, Ukraine, which were theoretically independent, actually part of the German empire.

May 14, 1918 — Czech Legion prisoners of war took over the Trans-Siberian Railroad from Samara to Irkutsk. Allies involved in Russian affairs, apparently to help the Czechs. British invaded Murmansk, Japanese in Siberia.

Austria-Hungary disintegrating.

October 30, 1918 — Turkey signed armistice.

November 3, 1918 — Austria-Hungary signed armistice.

German offensives on the Western Front began in March, April, May and July. Final Allied offensive began in September with gradual pushing back of Germans.

October 29, 1918 — Mutiny in the German navy. November 7 revolution in Germany. Ebert, leader of the Social Democrats became Chancellor. Kaiser Wilhelm II fled to the Netherlands and abdicated.

November 11, 1918 — Armistice signed at 11 A.M. at Rethondes in the forest of Compiègne. Treaty of Brest Litovsk annulled.

June 28, 1919 — Treaty of Versailles signed. Russian borders stayed much as they had been with the Treaty of Brest Litovsk except for the Ukraine, which was again added to its territory.





## XII WAR AND REVOLUTION

On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia. The Austrians were convinced that the Serbian government was involved in the assassination, so after assurances that Germany would lend its support, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on July 28. As patron and protector of Slavic states in the Balkan region, Russia began a general mobilization of troops on July 30, 1914. The German ultimatum of July 31, demanding demobilization within 12 hours, was refused by Russia. The following day, August 1, Germany declared war on Russia.

On August 11, representatives of the various Molotschna Mennonite churches met at the church in Alexanderwohl to discuss the grave international situation. It was felt that:

The recent occurrences indicate a strong need for repentance among the nations . . . we, on the basis of Scripture (I Timothy 2:1-2) have decided that it is our holy duty to pray without ceasing for our Majesty the Czar, for his family, and for our dear Fatherland . . . that the war might have a satisfactory conclusion for Russia. We have also confirmed that it is our God-ordained duty to make our devotion to Throne and Fatherland known by word and deed, even if sacrifices are required.<sup>2</sup>

Gerhard Plett and Jakob Duerksen of Hierschau were among the 28 leaders who signed this declaration.

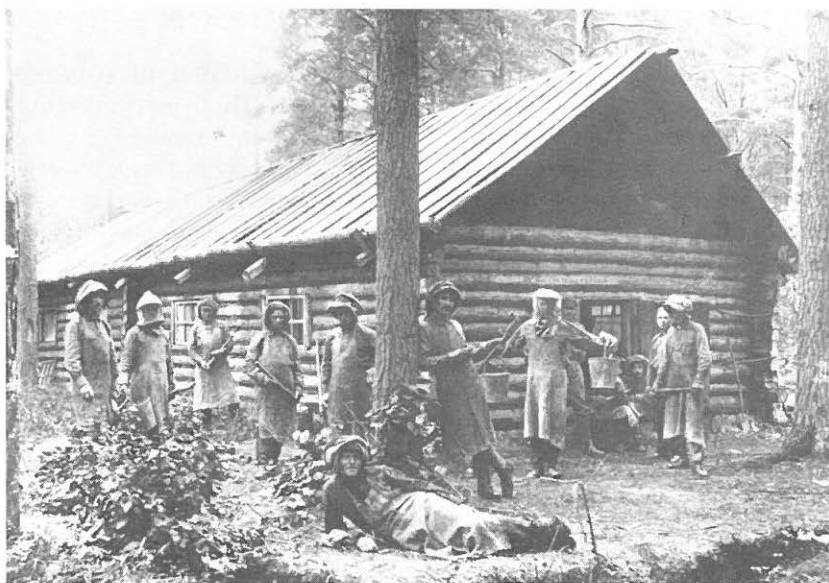
Mennonite deeds soon followed Mennonite words.

### World War I\*

With the outbreak of war, the *Forstei* was already available as a means by which Mennonites could provide alternate service to the Fatherland. This was greatly expanded. In the immediate pre-war period somewhat over 1,000 men served at any one time in eight different camps. By October, 1915, this had increased to

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\*Dates mentioned up to this point in this chapter are according to the New or Gregorian Calendar to conform with the commonly recognized historical dates, e.g. war was declared on August 1, 1914. From this point on we will again revert back to the Old or Julian Calendar, since it was still in use in Russia at that time and until February, 1918. According to this calendar the war began on July 19, 1918.



A Forstei camp near the Urals

5,400.<sup>3</sup> In 1917 there were 33 camps with a total of 5,772 men working at 303 different locations in European Russia alone, with more working in Siberia.<sup>4</sup> Heinrich Braun of Hierschau was among those who served in the *Forstei*, spending 22 months working at Anadol, a camp in South Russia, near the Sea of Azov.<sup>5</sup> Kornelius Plett, son of *Aeltester* Plett, served in the Crimea. He contracted some form of "black pox" and died there on February 23, 1916, his father officiating at the funeral.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the greatly increased number of young men working in the *Forstei*, other alternative service to the Fatherland was also utilized. By August 9, 1914 over 400 Mennonite young men had volunteered as *Sanitaeter*, of which 130 came from the Molotschna.<sup>7</sup>

In late August a telegram was received at the Halbstadt *Wolost* office announcing a universal draft, ordering all reservists of the year 1896 and older to report to Jekaterinoslaw by September 2. The young men of the Halbstadt *Wolost* were to gather in Halbstadt, those living in the Gnadenfeld *Wolost* were to report to Gnadenfeld by September 1.<sup>8</sup>

On September 1 there was first a service at a church in Halbstadt, at which minister H. Braun and *Aeltester* H. Unruh spoke, especially emphasizing prayer. The closing song was "*Jesu*,

# EASTERN EUROPE

JUNE 1914  
HH/DH



*geh voran!*" (Jesus, Guide Our Way), then the blessing was pronounced, the national anthem sung, and "all with automobile, wagon or on foot went to the railroad station . . . Many a farewell tear was shed. . ."<sup>9</sup> Similar farewells were being said at Gnadenfeld (where the Hierschau men gathered) with a 332 man contingent leaving for Waldheim (Stulnewo) early in the morning.<sup>10</sup> When the train pulled into Halbstadt, the 11 cars of Gnadenfeld reservists were joined by those from Halbstadt, the total of 700 to 800 men then heading north to Jekaterinoslaw. On September 2 most of these reservists were assigned to the Red Cross medical corps.

Although there had already been volunteers as well as the draft, one superpatriot took it upon himself to tour through the Mennonite colonies to encourage even more men to enlist for the medical service. P.P. Friesen scheduled meetings in various churches in October of 1914. Among the 13 meetings he held on one trip were those at Gnadenfeld on October 9, and Landskrone on the morning of October 11.<sup>11</sup> Apparently about 60 additional men registered as *Sanitaeter* in the Gnadenfeld *Wolost* as a result of this campaign.<sup>12</sup> By March 1, 1915, a total of 3,093 Mennonites were serving as medical orderlies, this number increasing to 5,421 by October, and to 6,548 by 1916.<sup>13</sup>

Service in the medical corps was sometimes well behind the battle lines, but it often involved bravery and was frequently fraught with danger. A correspondent reported:

How many medical corps men have died I really do not know. In one column in Austria it was said that six were dead with 80 being taken prisoner, of whom some were wounded . . . quite a few medical orderlies have been sick with typhus, and some have died. . .<sup>14</sup>

Other services in which Mennonites were involved included road building, kitchens and transportation. Total number involved in all aspects of service to the Fatherland were 10,821 in 1915, and 11,536 in 1916. About half the Mennonite men between the ages of 20 and 50 were serving in some capacity. Casualties (dead) numbered about 125.<sup>15</sup>

In the meantime the home front was not neglected. Hospitals were equipped to care for the wounded. The Halbstadt *Wolost* promised to maintain thirty beds at the Muntau hospital, 15 at Ohrloff.<sup>16</sup> During the war these facilities were frequently utilized for the care of sick and wounded soldiers.<sup>17</sup> At the hospital in

Waldheim, 30 beds were arranged for admission of the wounded. Kornelius Warkentin made the facilities available, and the Gnadenfeld *Wolost* undertook to support it financially. Dr. Heinrichs provided the medical coverage, while a management committee consisting of chairman P. Regehr of Landskrone, H. Martens and K. Warkentin of Waldheim, J. Nickel of Prangenau and Kornelius Siemens of Hierschau, looked after the physical plant. Linen was sewn by the women of Hierschau, Landskrone and Waldheim, as well as the girls' school in Gnadenfeld. The new facility was dedicated on September 7, 1914, by both the Russian Orthodox and the Mennonite spiritual leaders. Priest Wassilij Konzewitsch of Stulnewo prayed to God that the Russian troops would be victorious. *Aeltester* Gerhard Plett of Hierschau had a brief German message. He recited the chorale "*Ich bete an die Macht der Liebe*" (O Pow'r of Love, All Else Transcending), which the gathered Russians sang in Russian, the Mennonites in German. He closed with a reference to the Good Samaritan, adding that we should help ease the suffering of the wounded, regardless of race or religion. Kornelius Martens of Gnadenfeld also delivered a sermon, but in Russian. After the celebration was completed, a telegram was sent to the governor of Taurida province, asking him to relay to the Czar the expression of deep commitment and the willingness to serve Czar and Fatherland which the opening of the hospital demonstrated.<sup>18</sup>

A new military hospital was also opened in Berdiansk on September 11, 1914, and again hands of the Mennonite women were busy, for they supplied linens for the operation of this hospital as well.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, the Mennonites felt some obligations towards the families of Russian soldiers in the neighbouring villages. Churches helped the wives of Russian servicemen harvest their crops, and also gave money to the wives of wounded or sick soldiers totalling more than two million rubles. They collected dried fruit, toasted buns, as well as warm clothing to send to the soldiers themselves.<sup>20</sup>

### Anti-German Reaction

Despite what appeared to be an outpouring of true nationalistic spirit, even fervour, and despite the very practical Mennonite involvement both on the front and at home, the general anti-German sentiment in the country tended to include them. They were, after all, a minority which had insisted on maintaining its German identity for over a century, and had in many ways rejected certain aspects of Russian culture. In the early war years there was in-

creasing hatred for things German, often fanned by the right wing newspapers.<sup>21</sup> On November 7, 1914, *Friedensstimme*, was no longer allowed to publish, and on December 13, German was forbidden at public meetings, even including preaching in the churches.<sup>22</sup> German names of the Mennonite villages were changed, Halbstadt, for example, becoming Molotschansk, Gnadenfeld was Bogdanowka,<sup>23</sup> Landskrone Khlebnoye, Waldheim Lesnoye and Hierschau was Premarno (in Russian this means "example").<sup>24</sup> But language changes were not the only measures proposed to limit the activities and freedom of the German speaking aliens. The Mennonites were also to lose all their property, being paid a very low price, and that with government bonds which would not mature for 25 years. The Czar confirmed this measure by signing it into law on February 2, 1915. In the Molotschna, implementation of this law was somewhat delayed, but even here lists had already been prepared by late 1916 or early 1917.<sup>25</sup>

Some of the measures originally applied with the initial wave of anti-German hatred were later quietly retracted when the heat of the moment subsided. Permission for preaching in German was again granted on February 8, 1915, a scant two months after it had been banned.

Life in the Mennonite villages, including Hierschau, basically went on as usual. Work was carried out on the *Wirtschaften*, but since most of the young men were gone, the daughters of the family did much of the work formerly done by their brothers.

While the war was undoubtedly brutal and inhumane, not all aspects were equally harsh. A number of Mennonites were taken prisoner by the Austrians, but were cared for reasonably well, and could write relatives at home.<sup>26</sup> Prisoners taken by the Russians were also treated well in many instances. A Hungarian prisoner of war worked around the yard on the Johann Willms *Wirtschaft*. He was middle aged, had a family at home which he longed for, and was very friendly. The children of the Willms family took fruit out to him for his snacks. The Peter Dycks also had a prisoner, a girl, working on their *Wirtschaft*.<sup>27</sup>

## Revolution

While there were certainly some victories, particularly against the Austrians and the Turks, the war generally speaking was not going well for Russia. In Russia itself there were difficulties with transportation, since all efforts were directed to supplying the front. There were severe shortages of food, eventually leading to riots, particularly in Petrograd (St. Petersburg had also been renamed

because it sounded too German). The Duma and the Government were increasingly at odds with each other. Eventually a *Soviet* (a Russian term meaning council) of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was formed in Petrograd in February, 1917. Under its auspices, a Provisional Government of liberal politicians was set up with Prince Lvov at first heading the cabinet. Czar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate, and when his brother refused to accept the crown, the Provisional Government became the official representative of the State. One of the first actions of the new government was to declare amnesty for political, military and religious prisoners. Freedom of speech and press was proclaimed, as well as freedom to organize trade unions and to strike.

Mennonite reaction to the new regime was not long in coming. On March 6, 1917, Abraham Kroeker of Molotschansk (Halbstadt) wrote:

In a few days we have become free citizens in a free country . . . under the old regime we Mennonites were oppressed during the last times. God knows that we were honourable and served our Fatherland when war broke out, but the government was able to suppress this patriotism . . . we join with the new government heart and soul and believe that the basis for a better, blessed future for Russia, on the economic, cultural and spiritual aspects has been laid.<sup>28</sup>

H. Unruh of Jablonowka expressed sentiments similar to those of Kroeker:

It has been a revolution not from the grass roots, but from the top . . . with deep emotion we say, 'What a change through the leading of God!' . . . when I look at my children and my people I could now die in much more peace than I could just 14 days ago.<sup>29</sup>

While Kroeker and Unruh may not have represented the opinion of all Mennonites in Russia, it is likely that by that time even the most patriotic admirers of the Czar's regime had their doubts about it.

The new government faced a monumental task. War against the Central Powers was continuing, but the Russian Army was having increasing difficulty maintaining discipline. Soviets, similar to the one in Petrograd, were established in other areas of the country. Still, the civil situation was not completely in hand, and in general conditions seemed to be deteriorating. Many political par-



ties were vying for power, among them the Bolsheviks, so it was difficult to maintain political control, even in the capital of the country. Eventually Kerensky became Prime Minister of the Provisional Government in July, 1917; he then tried to restore law and order in Russia. One of his first actions was to arrest the Bolshevik leaders, who seemed to be more intent on producing anarchy than on restoring responsible government. And yet a reporter lamented:

After the toppling of the old government in Russia it seems that peace and quiet have not returned to the land. The job he has taken over appears to be too difficult for the present prime minister Kerensky . . . when he found that not all parties in the large country were with him he promised to bring law and order with blood and iron . . . yet we saw him retreat from that position.

. . .<sup>30</sup>

After a brief advance in July, 1917, the Russian Army was steadily pushed back, until on September 1 the German Army captured the city of Riga. In Petrograd the situation was at best confused. The government, an elected congress, as well as the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies tried to stave off anarchy. The Bolsheviks, steadily increasing in military strength, were willing to use any method, including anarchy, to grasp power. Revolution again spilled onto the streets of the capital. The Red Guards captured many key areas of Petrograd, including, on October 25 (November 7 according to the New or Gregorian Calendar), the Winter Palace. That day the Second Soviet Congress accepted a list of commissars drawn up by the Bolsheviks. V.I. Lenin was to be the Chairman, L.D. Trotsky in charge of Foreign Affairs. The following day Lenin announced that he wanted peace. German-Russian peace negotiations began at Brest Litovsk.

The true colours of the new regime became very apparent in short order. While events in distant Petrograd seemed initially to be of little consequence to the Mennonite villages of the southern Ukraine, once the Bolsheviks took power things changed. Local Soviets were organized, also in the Molotschna, usually consisting of the poorer and propertyless of society. Apparently a "social democratic group" had been functioning in Waldheim since 1916; it blossomed to a "workers' uprising" in early 1917.<sup>31</sup> Presumably some of the participants formed a Soviet in Waldheim in late 1917 or early 1918. When the Red Army troops appeared in Halbstadt on February 5, 1918, the control of the Soviets was consolidated. Officials were relieved of their positions, for example, David J. Dick



was replaced as *Oberschulze* of Halbstadt. In Hierschau Jakob Willms was no longer *Schulze*, the government of the village likely taken over by the Waldheim Soviet. There was immediate requisitioning of household goods, cattle, horses and agricultural machinery. Hostages were seized and ransoms collected. A number of citizens were arrested, tried before a military tribunal and summarily executed. Many villages suffered during these "Halbstadt Days" of terror, with robbery, violence and murder being common occurrences.<sup>32</sup>

In the meantime, peace negotiations between Germany and Russia continued in Bresk Litovsk. These negotiations were complicated by the fact that a Ukrainian Central Council had been formed, which on January 9, 1918, announced the complete independence of the Ukraine from Russia. The Council sent representatives to the peace talks to deal directly with the Central Powers, thereby hoping to consolidate its position. An agreement was struck in which the Central Powers pledged to support Ukrainian independence, concluding that the best way to accomplish this was to send in troops to occupy the area. In return, the Council promised to send the Central Powers at least a million tons of supplies. On March 1, 1918, German troops advanced into the Ukraine and restored Kiev to the control of the Council.<sup>33</sup>

Negotiations between the Russian government and the Central Powers continued. With each day bringing news of further German advances into Bolshevik-held territory, the Russian government was willing to conclude a peace at almost any price. On March 3, 1918, the Treaty of Brest Litovsk was signed, in which Russia lost the Baltic States, Poland and the Ukraine.

In the southern Ukraine, Bolshevik officials and other opportunists took one last fling before restoration of law and order. A report from Halbstadt described the events:

. . . Sunday, April 14, when people came home from church, horses in the *Wolost* were requisitioned . . . from Muensterberg the news came that the anarchists had demanded money and requisitioned horses. They threatened with, among other things, hand grenades . . . from Altonau to Lindenau they had stolen a total of 73,000 rubles, also 17 horses, saddles and other things . . . The following night there is said to have been a very stormy meeting of the Soviet in the regional office . . . Wednesday early the treasury at the office had been broken into . . . the books had been burned on the street, some had been thrown into the pond at the consumer

store . . . At the Post Office about 24,000 rubles in stamps and cash was taken . . . Thursday morning the regional office was completely cleaned out. Even the clocks had been taken from the wall. . . .<sup>34</sup>

## The German Occupation

On Friday, April 19, 1918, German troops arrived in the Molotschna. The Mennonites breathed a collective sigh of relief. A correspondent wrote:

What until recently would have been thought to be impossible has happened: the German military has come to rescue us from despotic and rough people, to establish order and secure life and property, which our land desperately needed. We first of all have to thank Him whose hand controls the history of peoples and countries . . . but we also greet our human liberators. . . .<sup>35</sup>

With restoration of law and order, many conditions returned to near normal. On the day of the German occupation David J. Dick was reinstated as *Oberschulze* of the Halbstadt area, and it was announced that other officials would resume their previous jobs.<sup>36</sup> Presumably Jakob Willms of Hierschau was again the *Schulze* as a result of this declaration. At a meeting of the Halbstadt *Wolost* on May 16, it was decided that names of the villages should revert back to their former German names.<sup>37</sup> A similar resolution was likely accepted by the Gnadenfeld *Wolst*. The agricultural situation improved, although loss of many horses hampered the work, and business and industry started to pick up.

The excesses of the previous period of anarchy brought on a counter-reaction. A number of former Soviet members were arrested and executed. A special commission was appointed in the Halbstadt *Wolost* to estimate the Mennonite losses, and where goods could be found they were reclaimed, sometimes by force. In a number of instances Mennonites were involved in these direct confrontations.

## The Selbstschutz

To prevent a recurrence of the pillage just recently experienced, many villages and districts began to organize a *Selbstschutz* (defensive army). These units often joined the practice drills of the German troops, and if not directly formed by the German officers, were at least to a significant degree inspired by them. By May, 1918, there were *Selbstschutz* units in at least four villages,

# EASTERN EUROPE

1917 AND 1918

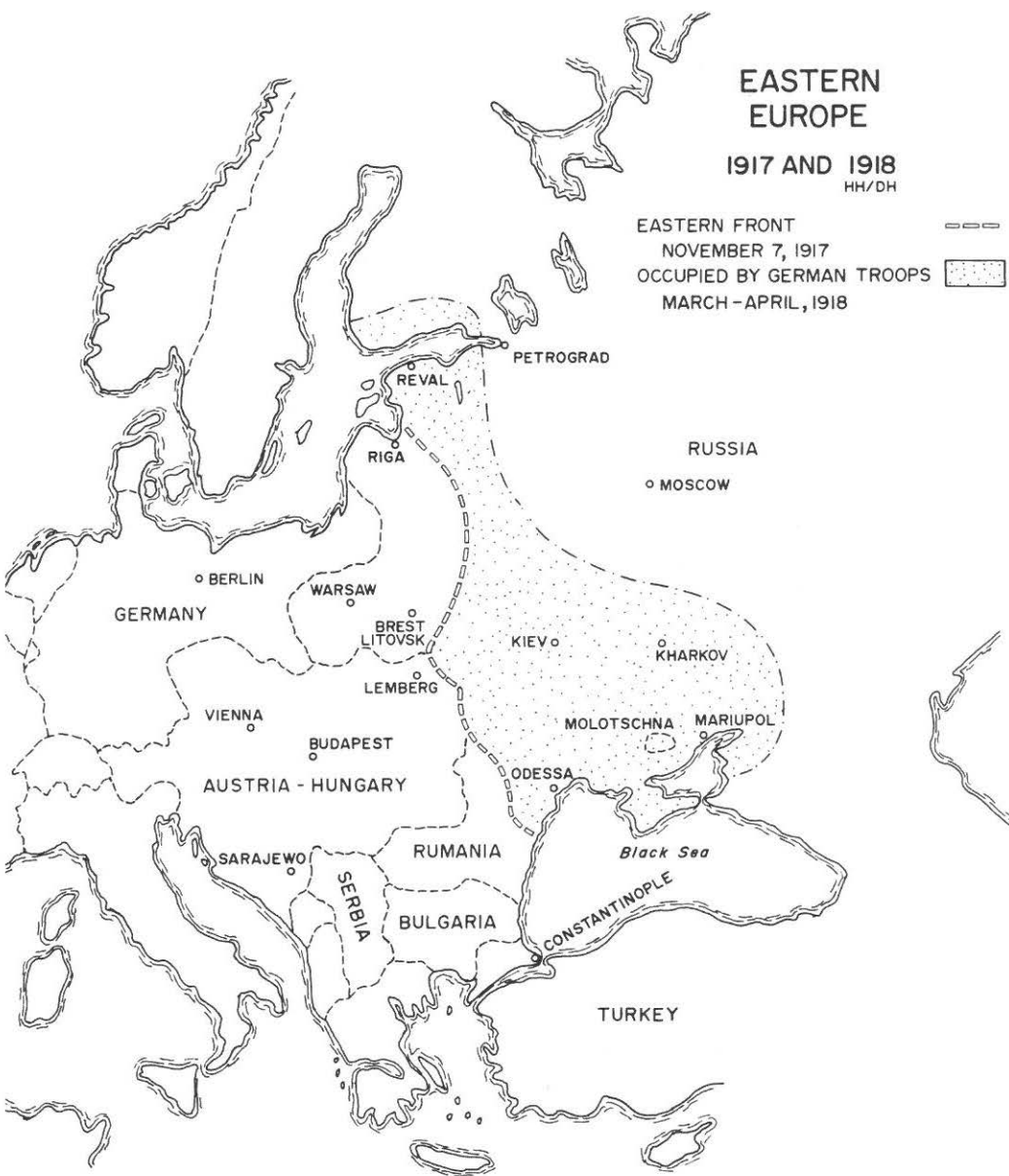
HH/DH

EASTERN FRONT

NOVEMBER 7, 1917

OCCUPIED BY GERMAN TROOPS

MARCH - APRIL, 1918



Halbstadt, Gnadenfeld, Tiege and Tiegenhagen.<sup>38</sup> At the May 16 meeting of the *Wolost*, Halbstadt decided to have 32 additional members as a regional defence unit. Pay was to be seven rubles a day as well as expenses, German soldiers receiving five rubles per man.<sup>39</sup> The 182nd Saxon Regiment, which was stationed in Halbstadt, helped direct the military drills.

Reaction of the Mennonite constituency to the formation of the *Selbstschutz* units was by no means all favourable. The subject was discussed at some length at the *Allgemeine Mennonitische Bundeskonferenz* (All-Mennonite General Conference), held in Lichtenau June 30 to July 2, 1918. The delegates confirmed by a vote that they felt non-resistance had a biblical base. They also heard arguments that the ideal was one thing, but what was to be done about the reality of pillage and murder in their own midst? While confirming the Mennonite stance on non-resistance, the conference stopped short of condemning those who did not share this view.<sup>40</sup>

Eventually almost all of the villages in the Molotschna (with the exception of two) formed *Selbstschutz* units. Hierschau also had one. The Hierschau *Selbstschutz* included almost all men between the ages of 18 and 45, totalling perhaps 60 to 70. There were a few conscientious objectors, Hermann Goertzen being one of them; these men volunteered to serve as medical orderlies instead. Organizationally, the *Selbstschutz* members in Hierschau considered themselves to be appointed by the village, but were also to some degree under the command of the overall *Selbstschutz* of the Gnadenfeld *Wolost*, where Jakob Warkentin of Waldheim was in charge.<sup>41</sup>

During the summer of 1918 the Hierschau *Selbstschutz* was trained by the German soldiers in the area, using the meadow north of the village on the Waldheim end of the street as parade ground. As autumn approached, the training was taken more seriously, since there appeared to be more activity of the Makhno anarchists in the area. To those who followed world news, it was also becoming increasingly apparent that the German occupation would not last much longer. Troops were being withdrawn because of the collapsing Western front. On October 29 there was a mutiny in the German navy, and on November 7 revolution broke out in Germany itself. Kaiser Wilhelm II fled to the Netherlands and abdicated. On November 11, 1918, an armistice was signed at 11 A.M., on a railroad car at Rethondes in the forest of Compiègne in France. The war to end all wars was over. The treaty of Brest Litovsk was annulled.

When it became necessary for the German troops to withdraw from the Molotschna, sometime in November, the Hierschau *Selbstschutz* members lined up on their parade ground. A German officer named Vogt addressed the group. "I have chosen the best one among you, Heinrich Braun." Then turning to Heinrich he continued, "If anyone can do it, you can."

Heinrich accepted the command, then set about to organize his men. A watch was set up every night at each end of the village, and another in the middle, with three or four men at each place. Code words were arranged, especially for use at night. They were usually some German or Low German word such as fish, cow, horse, and were changed every day. At midnight Heinrich Braun with his bodyguard would circle the village to make sure that nothing had happened, and that the guards were awake. Very organized and well regarded, Heinrich was affectionately labelled "*Fuehrer* (leader) Braun" by his companions.<sup>42</sup>

Little could "*Fuehrer* Braun" and his band of 60 or 70 poorly armed *Selbstschutz* volunteers know that they would soon face the irresistible onslaught of one of the most confusing, yet pivotal periods of modern history.

## HIERSCHAU CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS<sup>1</sup> 1914-1922\*

July 19, 1914 — Germany declared war. *Schulze* Jakob Willms notified.

September 1, 1914 — Reservists from the Gnadenfeld *Wolost*, which would include those from Hierschau, gathered in Gnadenfeld, then via Stulnewo travelled by train to Jekaterinoslaw, to arrive there on September 2.

Late 1914 — Name changed from Hierschau to Premarno.

November, 1917 — Local Soviets came to power. Hierschau likely controlled by the Waldheim Soviet. Jakob Willms deposed as *Schulze*.

February 5 to April 18, 1918 — "Halbstadt Days of Terror." Red troops occupied the area with requisitioning, robbing and some murders occurring.

April 19, 1918 — German troops occupied the area. Molotschna part of the independent Ukraine. Jakob Willms likely restored as *Schulze* of Hierschau.

May 16, 1918 or shortly thereafter — Name changed back to Hierschau.

Early Summer, 1918 — Formation of *Selbstschutz*, including a Hierschau *Selbstschutz*.

Early October, 1918 — Makhno attacks started.

November, 1918 — German troops evacuated the Molotschna area. *Fuehrer* Braun and the *Selbstschutz* patrolled Hierschau.

November, 1918 to March, 1919 — White Army under General Denikin occupied the area. White officers took over administration of Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld *Wolosts*.

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\*Dates before February, 1918, are Old or Julian Calendar, after that date they are New or Gregorian Calendar.

- Weekend of December 5, 1918 — Battle in the Chernigowka area west of Waldheim, in which the *Selbstschutz* of Halbstadt, Gnadenfeld and Waldheim, together with the White Army, defeated Makhno. Hierschau *Selbstschutz* did not participate. White Army gradually retreated, leaving the *Selbstschutz* to defend the Molotschna for three months.
- March 2, 1919 — Heavy fighting north of the Molotschna. Makhno allied himself with the Red Army.
- March 6 to 10, 1919 — *Selbstschutz* made its last stand, but was unable to stop the invaders. Many *Selbstschutz* members fled south to the Crimea the night of March 9-10.
- March 11, 1919 — Red troops of the 33rd Division, under General Dobenko, occupied Gnadenfeld. Hierschau probably occupied the same day. Through a direct intervention by two Mennonite representatives, Dobenko promised immunity from excessive reprisal, although he allowed his troops three days of plundering. All arms were to be surrendered. Members of the *Selbstschutz*, however, would be executed if they were found.
- March to June, 1919 — Terror and hardships in the area, often by marauding groups of Makhnowze. Requisitioning of goods. A tribunal was set up in Melitopol, with some Mennonites being executed.
- Mid-June, 1919 — White Army under Denikin arrived in the northern Molotschna. Requests for feeding and quartering of troops and horses. Some Mennonites joined the White Army as drivers, but also as gunners and infantrymen. Some were assigned to Dmitrii Donskoi, an armoured train. Heinrich Braun of Hierschau was a gunner on an armoured train, perhaps at this time.
- September, 1919 — White Army collapse. At the end of September Makhno reached the Molotschna. There was unprecedented terror, murder, rape and destruction, as the Makhnowze sought revenge. Mass killings in Eichenfeld, Blumenort and Sagraadowka. Little such activity in Hierschau, although a few members of the *Selbstschutz* were shot, possibly during this time.

Early November, 1919 — Denikin's White Army again took over the Molotschna. Attempts were made to re-organize the *Selbstschutz*.

Last Weeks of December, 1919, Early 1920 — Reds counter-attacked. Whites gradually driven from the area, and evacuated to the Crimea. Denikin resigned. Wrangel appointed. Molotschna area stabilized under Communist control.

October, 1919 to Spring, 1920 — Typhus epidemic in the whole area, but most severe in Chortitza. Molotschna sent aid.

Early June, 1920 — White offensive under Wrangel reached the Molotschna, where it slowed down. For weeks the lines seesawed back and forth in the Molotschna area. Villages repeatedly changed hands, the people having to shelter whatever troops occupied the region at the time.

June 15, 1920 — Wrangel terminated land liquidation laws originally enacted under Nicholas II. Volunteers joined Wrangel's army. A "German Regiment" was formed which included many Mennonites.

June 17, 18, 19 — White Army retreated through the area, under pressure of Red Army troops under Zhloba.

June 20 — A major battle was fought in the Tiegerweide-Alexanderkrone area. Zhloba's cavalry was defeated and pushed back in the direction of Chernigowka. The Second Don Division, and likely some Cossacks caught up with the retreating cavalry around Hierschau, a battle resulting, in which the Reds sustained additional losses. They continued their retreat through Waldheim to Chernigowka.

Summer, 1920 — Aerodrome established on pasture north of Hierschau. Villages, including Hierschau and Waldheim, were periodically bombarded by the armoured trains on the Tokmak Railroad.

October 15, 1920 — Pitched battle forced the final retreat of Wrangel's units from the area. The Whites withdrew to the Crimea. White opposition effectively eliminated in the Molotschna area.



November, 1920 — Partial return to public order under Communist rule. Banditry still common. Quarters of troops in many villages continued until March, 1922. Refugees and beggars were common.

January, 1922 — Imprisonment of local leaders in Waldheim. Gerhard Plett of Hierschau and Aron Wall, a visitor, both released. Some others were executed.



### XIII CATASTROPHE

It is not possible to give a complete chronological account of precisely what happened in Hierschau during the revolution and the following civil war. People remember some events, but often did not know their significance at the time, and certainly most did not record exactly when they occurred. We will try to fit some of the stories into what we know was the general course of events in the area, but will not compile a complete narrative review. Having heard more of the reports from my own family, simply because more time was spent with them, the Willms *Wirtschaft* will be mentioned more than others. Similar events transpired at each and every home in the village. In general it must be said that while there was terror, banditry, murder and destruction, Hierschau was not affected as severely as some of the other Mennonite villages. There were no mass murders, there was no gross or wholesale destruction, but Hierschau certainly did share in this catastrophic period of Mennonite history.

#### Selbstschutz

When the German troops withdrew from the Molotschna area, the Hierschau *Selbstschutz* kept careful watch over the village, especially at night. They found special areas for protection, little gullies or ravines at each end of the village, to be able to defend themselves better. In the daytime, since they could see farther, they were more relaxed. On several occasions, when they saw the dust of approaching wagons, the *Selbstschutz* busily marched back and forth in the village. The bandits must have seen this, and caught the glint of the guns in the sunlight, for they turned around and retreated before they ever got close. When wagons did come through the village, they were stopped to make sure the occupants were not carrying guns.

Many of the supplies used by the Hierschau *Selbstschutz* were obtained from the White Army. They had French rifles, which were not so good, and older Japanese models, which were better. They used Austrian, German and Russian guns as well. Supplies of bullets were often low, with each defender sometimes having only three or four shells.

The policy of the Hierschau *Selbstschutz* was to remain strictly a defensive force. When they heard that a large group of Makhnowze had gathered at Chernigowka, they stood ready to meet them, but did not join those groups which went out to attack them. Nonetheless, there was probably joy in Hierschau when it

was learned that Makhno had been defeated at Chernigowka on the weekend of December 5, 1918.

Hamberg and Klippenfeld were Mennonite villages north of Hierschau, somewhat isolated from the rest of the Molotschna colony. When they noticed someone approaching, they would send horsemen to notify Heinrich Braun or the *Schulze* of Hierschau. A patrol was then sent out from Hierschau to ensure that nothing would happen to these villages.<sup>2</sup> Periodically scouts were sent into some of the neighbouring Russian villages of the area. A fellow named Neudorf was captured by bandits on such a mission, and was likely executed.<sup>3</sup>

And so the Hierschau *Selbstschutz* practised, patrolled, guarded and marched. According to *Fuehrer* Braun, they did not kill or even shoot at anyone, although with their constant drilling and preparedness it sounds as if they did mean to protect their loved ones and homes, by force if necessary. When the crucial time came, however, the opposition was much too strong for any struggling group of *Selbstschuetzler*. On March 11, 1919 the Red Army under General Dobenko, together with the Makhnowze, swept through the area towards Gnadenfeld, where the Gnadenfeld forces officially capitulated. Two Mennonite representatives met with General Dobenko just outside the *Wolost* office in Gnadenfeld to plead for Mennonite lives. They were forcefully reminded by Dobenko that they had been renegades from the faith of their fathers: 'For 400 years you could not take arms, but now for your damned Kaiser Wilhelm . . .' Eventually Dobenko agreed that his troops would not kill, but were allowed to plunder for three days. Where they found members of the *Selbstschutz*, however, they would execute them.<sup>4</sup>

When the Red Army had moved through the area, the Hierschau *Selbstschutz* abandoned any hope of struggle and handed in its weapons. Many members fled from the area, or went into hiding, at least for the time being. Even so, Wilhelm Baerg and Gerhard Thiessen (son of Johann Thiessen) were shot when it was discovered that they had been members of the *Selbstschutz*. No proper funeral or burial was possible at that time, so their bodies were simply wrapped in sheets and put into graves.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the warning to hand in all weapons at the *Schulze's* place, someone had hidden guns and shells in a strawstack at the Bernhard Plett *Wirtschaft*. Whether their son Peter had actually hidden the firearms, or whether it was someone else is debatable. In any case, after they were discovered, Peter Plett was taken to the Makhno headquarters in Waldheim and sentenced to death for

this alleged offence. He was taken behind a small grove of trees on the east end of Waldheim and shot through the head. Peter Plett was buried at night, with his body simply wrapped in a sheet. Later, when circumstances settled down, there was a proper funeral in the school.<sup>6</sup>

## The Makhnowze

After the Makhnowze occupied the area, they repeatedly looked for the men who had been members of the *Selbstschutz*. The former leader, Heinrich Braun, appeared to be of particular interest. The Makhno bands would come at night, thinking that they would catch the *Selbstschutz* members sleeping at home. So it was that the home of Heinrich Braun, the Willms *Wirtschaft* (Heinrich Braun's mother had married Johann Willms) had frequent nocturnal guests. The Willms family was afraid of these visits. Every evening when dusk had fallen they would sneak through the barn, out along the garden path to the forest. Here, with a few blankets, they would bed down for the night. From this vantage point they could often hear the bandit groups pounding on their house door, but since the door was unlocked, and there was obviously no one at home, they would eventually leave. After about a week of "camping" every night, arrangements were made for the youngest two girls, Katharina and Aganetha, to sleep at the Kornelius Boschmanns, who lived several houses down the street. The older members of the family continued to spend the nights in the protective shadows of the forest. This continued to be the procedure for several more weeks, presumably until the Makhnowze gave up on finding Heinrich Braun.<sup>7</sup>

\* \* \*

During one of the times when the troops (most people would describe them as bandits) of Nestor Makhno occupied the area, Mennonite youths were forced to help them. Aron Wall of Alexandertal was one such young man, being compelled to drive a wagon for the Makhnowze. On one occasion a large number, perhaps up to 60 wagons, drove onto the Johann Willms yard to bed down for the night. It was the policy of Gertrude Willms that if the family had food, it would be shared. So it was that the three eldest daughters of the family, Maria, Elisabeth and Gertrude, took the hundred or so troops and drivers their evening snack. This consisted of a cup of milk and a piece of buttered bread for each man. Aron Wall was one of the drivers in this group. Not wanting to be

recognized as a Mennonite, he always pulled his hat way down, was very quiet, and only responded with *Spasieba* (Russian: thank you) when he received his food. This did not mean, however, that he could not see what was going on. He certainly observed the girls as they were moving about the yard, handing out the food. Several months later, when things had quietened down a bit, he sent Maria a letter. The acquaintance became friendship and eventually they were married.<sup>8</sup>

### The Battle of Hierschau

In the spring of 1920 the White Army, now under the command of General Wrangel, began a new offensive which began in the Crimea, and reached the Molotschna early in June. For weeks the battle lines seesawed back and forth in this area, villages repeatedly changing hands. Wrangel, in his memoirs, described some of the fighting which occurred during this time.

On June 10, 1920, there appears to have been a slight lull in the fighting, the Whites consolidating their positions, the Red Army reorganizing and bringing in new recruits. At that point the White Army, holding a line from the Sea of Azov to Waldheim, consisted of the Second Don Division, then the Don Cossack Division under General Abramov. From Waldheim through Gross Tokmak to Station Popovo on the Dniepr River were the 13th and 34th Infantry Divisions of the Second Army Corps under General Slashchev. The 13th Infantry Division likely occupied Hierschau at the time. Other troops, including the Kuban Cossack and the Kornilov divisions, held the line along the left bank of the Dniepr back along its course to the delta on the Black Sea. Facing these forces were the various cavalry and infantry divisions of the 13th Red Army.<sup>9</sup>

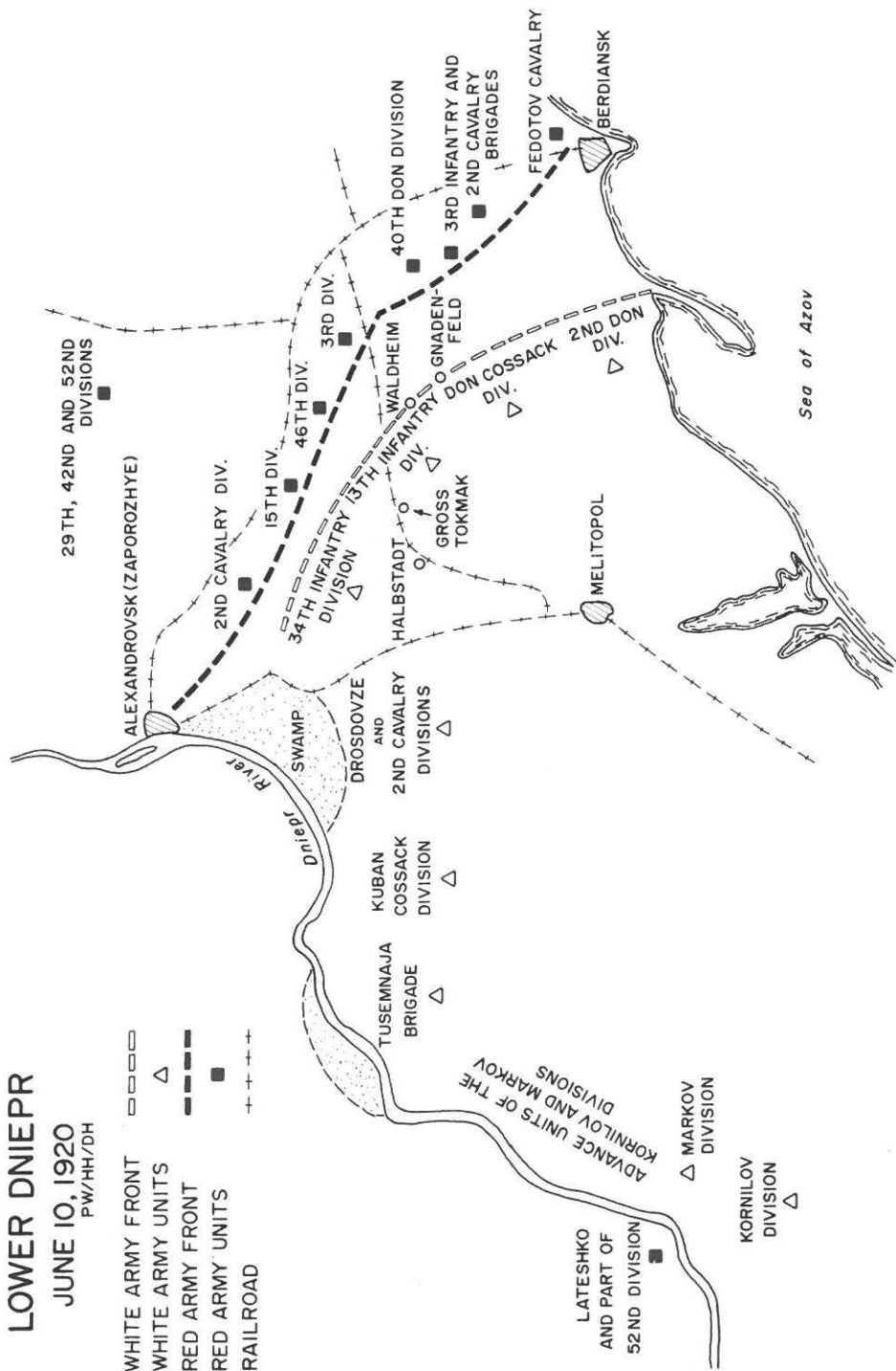
A few days later more serious fighting resumed. On June 17 the White Army in the Waldheim sector pulled back under pressure by the Red cavalry under General Zhloba, moving in a south-west direction. This retreat probably occurred through Hierschau. Zhloba preferred to move his troops at night because of the losses inflicted by White aircraft during the daylight hours. The pull-back, apparently a planned ruse to obtain a more strategic position, continued until June 19. By then the main forces of the Red cavalry occupied the south-central portion of the Molotschna, including Friedensdorf, Margenau, Tiegerweide, Kleefeld and Alexanderkrone. Total forces of the 13th Red Army in the region, including a number of additional units which had joined Zhloba, were 25,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry. Facing them in a semicircle were the various elements of the White Army, including several

# LOWER DNIETR

JUNE 10, 1920

PW/HH/DH

- WHITE ARMY FRONT
- WHITE ARMY UNITS
- RED ARMY FRONT
- RED ARMY UNITS
- RAILROAD



Don Divisions, Cossacks, the Kornilov Division as well as other infantry and cavalry divisions. They totalled 15,000 infantry and 6,500 cavalry.

At 6 P.M. on June 19, General Wrangel sent directives to his generals, ordering an offensive to begin against the enemy before dawn on June 20, in the direction of Gnadenfeld. At 5 A.M. the Second Don Division began the attack, being joined by the others by the time the light of dawn broke the horizon. Pressed on all sides, pounded by artillery, strafed by machine guns of White aircraft, the Red Army started to panic. A large portion, at least two divisions, under the command of Zhloba, broke through the lines in the direction of Halbstadt and Gross Tokmak. Here they were met by the 13th Infantry Division and the armoured trains, so Zhloba again turned south, where his fleeing cavalry encountered the Drosdovze Division. Finally a full-scale retreat of all Red units began in the direction of Chernigowka, with the White cavalry in hot pursuit. Many Red cavalymen abandoned their exhausted horses and fled on foot, hiding where they could. In all, the Whites captured 40 cannons, 200 machine guns, almost 3,000 horses, and took about 2,000 prisoners.

Meanwhile, General Wrangel and his staff, with headquarters in Melitopol, anxiously awaited news from the battlefield. The rumble of the unending artillery fire could quite easily be heard, yet there was no direct communication with the various units on the field. The general staff continued to work efficiently, although it was quite obvious that they were extremely nervous, and by noon the tension was almost unbearable. Finally a new sound appeared, the approaching sound of a propeller. An aircraft skimmed low over the railroad, dropping a note which said, "The enemy has been struck on the head, encircled by our warriors. General Tkachev reports a complete destruction of the enemy."

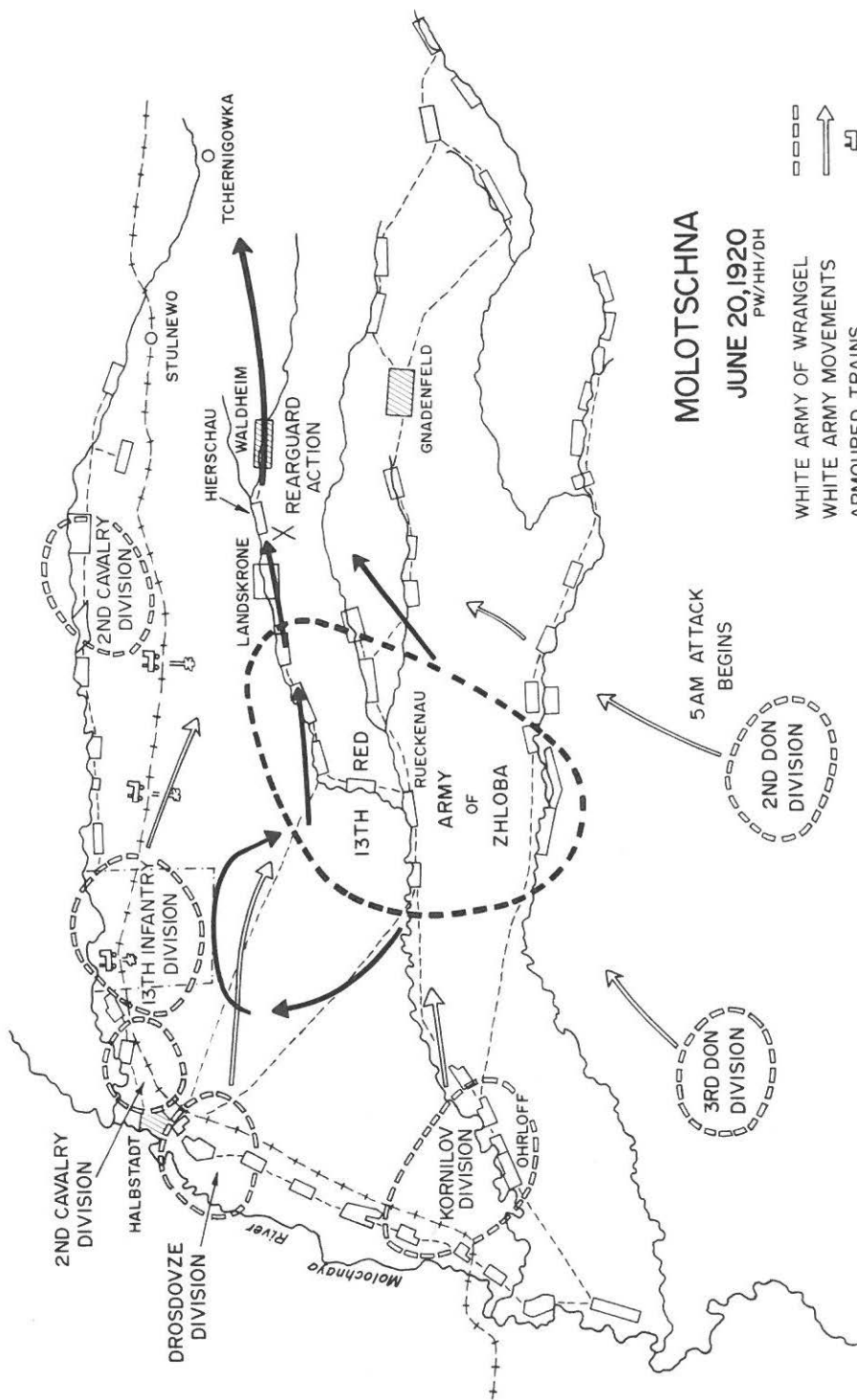
The following day, on June 21, a church service was held in Melitopol, thanking God for the victory.<sup>10</sup>

\* \* \*

Many of the Red troops fleeing from the field of battle followed the road through Friedensdorf, Landskrone, Hierschau, then on to Waldheim and Chernigowka.

Johann Epp and his sons, including Peter, were working on their fields outside the village of Hierschau on June 20, 1920. They could hear the sounds of battle in the Rueckenau area, then they saw the retreating Red Army streaming along the road, through





## MOLOTSCHNA

JUNE 20, 1920  
PW/HH/DH

- WHITE ARMY OF WRANGEL
- WHITE ARMY MOVEMENTS
- ARMoured TRAINS
- RED ARMY OF ZHLOBA
- RED ARMY MOVEMENTS

Hierschau and on to Waldheim. First came the artillery, each cannon pulled by four or six horses. Then came the supply wagons and the kitchen. The kitchen consisted of a big barrel of borscht on two large wheels pulled by a camel. Masses of infantry followed, then finally came the cavalry. Around Hierschau the White cavalry caught up with the Red rearguard, and a battle resulted, largely southwest of the village. After further losses the Red Army retreat continued in the direction of Waldheim.<sup>11</sup>

\* \* \*

While the battle was going on around Hierschau, Heinrich Braun went to check the empty barn on their *Wirtschaft*. The barn was empty, because every horse had already been taken, but he did find a Communist Commissar, who pled, "Comrade, please save me!" Heinrich led him to the hayloft. For this help the commissar gave him his officer's revolver.

As the battle proceeded, and then the Red retreat continued, another 15 to 20 soldiers hid themselves in the Willms hayloft. As the Whites occupied the village, they rode down the street, shouting onto each yard to give up any prisoners they had, otherwise it would cost their own lives. Fifteen to twenty Cossacks came riding onto the Johann Willms yard, swords drawn, yelling at Mrs. Willms, demanding that she give up anyone hidden there. Hearing this from the hayloft, possibly not wanting their hosts to suffer, the Reds came down onto the yard with their hands up. They, together with the other soldiers found hidden in Hierschau, were marched off in the direction of Waldheim. The Willms never discovered what happened to these prisoners.<sup>12</sup>

\* \* \*

After the dust of battle had settled around Hierschau, some of the local men were organized to help in the clean-up operation. Many Red soldiers had been killed in action, and their bodies had to be disposed of. Heinrich Braun and three others made up one crew that went around the country-side with their wagon. It was very hot, so the bodies soon started to smell. Many corpses were found close to horses, probably meaning that they had been in the cavalry; many also had large scalp wounds, the common trademark of Cossack swords.

When the crew came upon a body, each man would grasp a leg or an arm, and with a "1-2-3-4" they would swing it onto the

wagon. When they had six or seven bodies, they would take them to a mass grave which had been dug, and would unload them in the similar manner. Half a dozen bodies commonly shared a grave. No identification was made, and no memorial stones were erected. The men participating in this macabre work now and then did wonder who would be waiting for the return of a loved one, waiting in vain.<sup>13</sup>

\* \* \*

A day or two after the occupation of the region by the victorious White Army, a woman beckoned from the Willms barn. She was a Communist nurse who had not been discovered in the hay where she had hidden. The Willms then took her to the basement of their house, the small area under the pantry used for storage of food. The woman herself seemed to have little concept of the danger she was in, since she talked freely and wanted to go outside. The Willms family had to keep someone with the nurse at all times just to keep her quiet. White troops were quartered throughout the village, so that any suspicious noise could easily have led to discovery, both to her own and to the Willms family detriment.

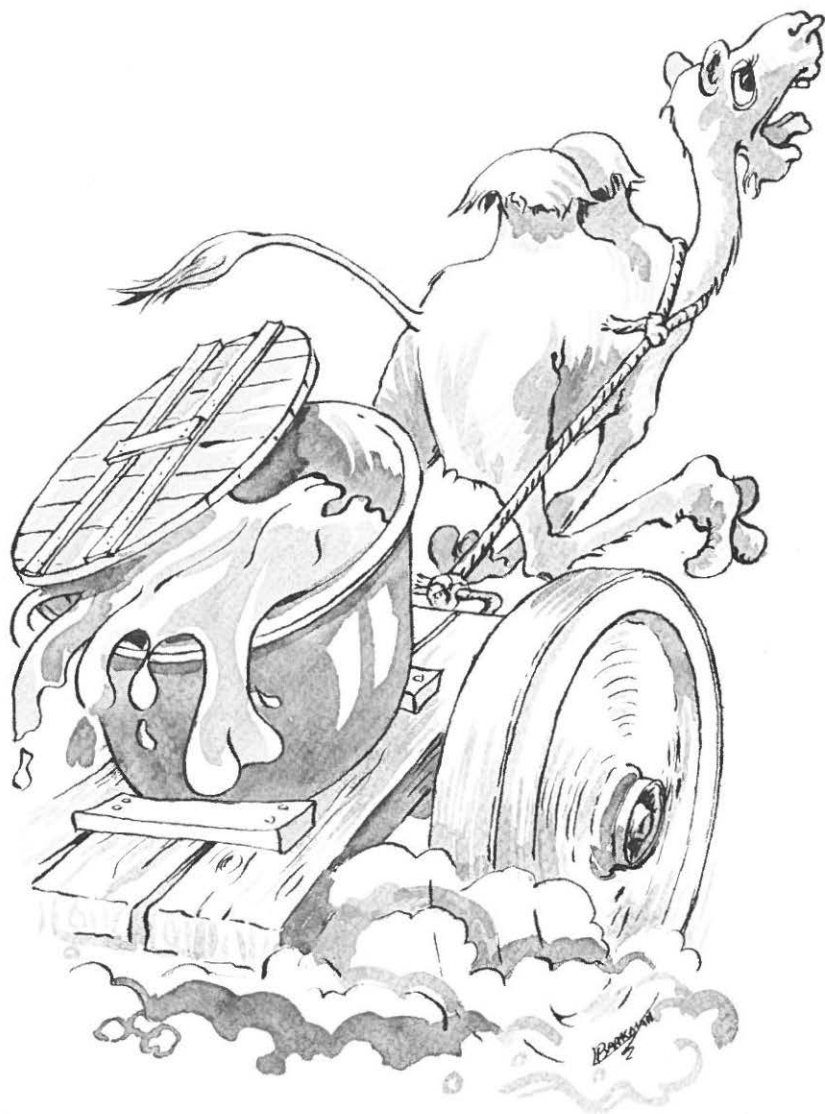
The Willms knew that the village cowherd was a Communist, so they contacted him about their unscheduled boarder. One dark night they arranged to take the nurse to the cowherd's house, and he then arranged her escape from the area. A month or two later the Willms received a letter of thanks from their garrulous guest.<sup>14</sup>

\* \* \*

After the Whites occupied Hierschau, one of the Red Army units seems to have become bewildered, and did not know which way to turn. The soup kitchen, that is, a camel pulling a barrel of borscht, came running down the main street of the village, splashing as it went. While the White soldiers found this to be an amusing sight, they did not touch the borscht, for fear that this might be a trap, a ploy to poison them. They did not, however, apprehend the camel as a Communist spy, despite the suspicious circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

\* \* \*

The White forces under General Wrangel included a small air-



The Communist Soup Kitchen

force. Aircraft were used for reconnaissance, sending messages and sometimes for strafing the enemy troops with machine guns. Probably during the summer of 1920 a small aerodrome was established on the pasture just north of Hierschau. Three or four of the two-seater single-engine aircraft were stationed there, with the pilots, mechanics and other personnel being quartered in the various village homes. Several of the pilots stayed with the Johann Willms family, and seemed to enjoy the hospitality. When they had completed a mission, and were about to land, they would buzz the Willms *Wirtschaft* and wave. This meant that they were hungry, and signaled mother Willms to start cooking.

Flying during those years was still a hazardous occupation, and before the aircraft moved on, one of them eventually crashed and burned just north of Hierschau.<sup>16</sup>

\* \* \*

One of the White Army units which fought in the battle of June 20, and participated in the rout of the Reds from the region, was the Kornilov Division. Soon after the battle they were quartered in the area, many staying in Hierschau. An officer of the division stayed in the *Sommer Stube* of the Willms home, while a flag, likely the divisional banner, was spread out in the *Grosse Stubbe*. The ordinary soldiers slept on the yard, using clumps of straw, near the machine shed. Every morning the troops would line up on the yard for devotions, and the divisional band would play. When it came time for the troops to move on, fond farewells were said, and the band played a number of hymns for Mrs. Willms.<sup>17</sup>

## The Waldheim Prison

On September 4, 1921, Aron Wall of Alexandertal and Maria Braun, daughter of Gertrude Willms, were married in Hierschau. The ceremony took place in the Willms *Scheune*, with *Aeltester* Gerhard Plett, uncle of the bride, as the officiating minister. The young couple then settled down in Alexandertal, where Aron was soon involved in the village administration.

Four months later, in January, 1922, the newly married couple came back to visit Gertrude Willms because of her poor health. While they were there a group of armed, mounted anarchists swept onto the yard, and with dire threats took Aron Wall prisoner, and carried him off to Waldheim. *Aeltester* Gerhard Plett was also imprisoned at the time, perhaps in a move to apprehend all known village leaders. They, together with perhaps 60 others, were kept

in the basement of a house adjoining the hospital in Waldheim, in a space so small that not everyone could lie down at one time. After 14 days of incarceration Aron Wall, together with a number of other prisoners, was condemned to death.

The judge of the Waldheim court, together with his wife, was quartered in Hierschau. It so happens that they stayed in the home of Aron Wall's mother-in-law, Gertrude Willms. Maria Wall had remained in the home of her mother, and now asked the wife of the judge if she would intervene on Aron's behalf. Although she had been shown kindness in the home, such as attempts to teach her to read and sew, she was too terrified of her husband to speak to him about his "work."

One noon hour the judge came back to his quarters and, being very thirsty, asked for a glass of water. To enable her to see him, Maria volunteered to bring it to him. She used the chance to plead for the life of her husband. The judge told her to be ready in one and a half hours. Promptly at the designated time, Aron Wall appeared at the door of the Willms home, together with a pass. He and his young wife immediately headed for home, to their own village, just to stay out of harm's way.

Later that same night a number of men were taken out of the crowded basement cell in Waldheim, and most likely were shot. Among them were Heinrich Toews of Waldheim and Peter Klassen of Schardau.<sup>18</sup>

*Aeltester* Gerhard Plett, not being of good health, found the conditions in the cell to be very difficult. Room was made for him to lie down, but even so, the cold and wet floor aggravated his arthritic condition. Despite the trying circumstances, he did try to console his fellow prisoners, sometimes in their last hours. Gerhard's son was eventually able to arrange for a transfer to the Waldheim hospital because of his deteriorating medical condition. After recuperating for one month, Gerhard returned to his home in Hierschau.<sup>19</sup>

\* \* \*

And so Hierschau and other Mennonite villages of the Molotschna settled into an uneasy truce with the new regime. But things were not the same. Even the land, the sustaining gift of God, seemed to groan under the new taskmasters.

HEINRICH BRAUN  
Son of the Revolution  
(1895-1983)

Heinrich Braun was born in Hierschau on October 17, 1895.<sup>1</sup> He was the son of Johann and Gertrude Braun. Gertrude Plett had married a widower, Johann Braun, who already had five children. Heinrich was the second child of this marriage. An older brother Franz, born in 1894, died as an infant. Two other children, Elisabeth (1897) and Maria (1898) were also born into the family. After a three-day illness Johann Braun died of typhus on June 23, 1899, leaving Heinrich fatherless at the age of four. While the original Braun children were distributed to foster homes by their *Vormuende*, the younger children of the second marriage, Heinrich, Elisabeth and Maria, remained with their mother. Almost a year later, on April 27, 1900, Widow Braun married Johann Willms, a 35 year-old bachelor from Nikolaidorf. The newly married couple settled down in Hierschau, likely purchasing *Wirtschaft* No. 30 at the time. Six children were born after the establishment of the new Willms household, Gertrude (1901, but died a few days later), Gerhard (1903), Gertrude (1905), Johann (1907), Katharina (1909) and Aganetha (1911).

At the age of seven Heinrich went to the village school, and generally speaking liked it, being the best pupil in his class. His first teacher, Daniel Fast, was on the strict side, even punishing children for what they had done on the weekend. One gets the impression from the vivid description offered by Heinrich that he may have been the recipient of the occasional *Pruegel* himself. Subsequent teachers, Gerhard Papke and Abram Bergen, were more popular. After completing seven grades of village school, Heinrich would have liked to continue his education, but because of his stepfather's poor health, he stayed at home to work on the farm.

During the time of his growing up Heinrich likely had some difficulties in adjusting to his stepfather. On one occasion Johann Willms, always having an eye for bargains, bought a very well-made blue coat at an auction sale of the property of a man who had just committed suicide. Heinrich had to wear the coat, even though he did not want to. But one blue coat did not change Heinrich's disposition. A younger sister remembers him as a very helpful and understanding older brother, having a good sense of humour.<sup>2</sup>

Johann Willms' health continued to deteriorate, likely leaving Heinrich with steadily more responsibility on the *Wirtschaft*. On

April 25, 1914, at the age of 48 years, Johann Willms died, and was buried in the Hierschau cemetery. On this occasion Widow Willms was able to keep the whole family together, likely because she had such capable and hard-working sons, who were able to manage the *Wirtschaft*.

The clouds of war soon appeared on the horizon, with the outbreak of hostilities later in 1914. In the autumn of 1915 Heinrich received his draft notice, so he reported for his physical examination and chose to serve in the *Forstei*. He was assigned to the Anadol Forestry Station in the southern Ukraine, near the Sea of Azov. In spring the men planted new sections of oak forest, in summer they hoed areas that had been planted a year or two previously, while in autumn and winter they thinned out and cleaned up larger existing forests. Many a time, probably while he was struggling to carry heavy timber on his shoulder, he wished that he had signed up as *Sanitaeter* instead. After 22 months of service in the *Forstei*, with the war virtually over for Russia, Heinrich found obtaining a discharge fairly easy. He saw a doctor who gave him a three-month leave because of his run-down condition. When his period of service was completed, he returned home to Hierschau.

By the time Heinrich returned home, the Czar's government had fallen, and local Soviets ruled the area. From February to April, 1918, there was a time of anarchy, with Red troops, if anything, contributing to the "Halbstadt Days" of terror. On April 19, 1918, German troops occupied the Ukraine, restoring law and order. Soon, quite probably at the instigation of, and certainly with the help of the German troops, the various Mennonite villages and districts established *Selbstschutz* units to ensure that law and order would be maintained. Hierschau also established such a unit, with almost universal participation. Heinrich Braun joined, and was likely an enthusiastic participant. Later, reflecting on his motives for joining, he felt that protection of his loved ones, particularly of his mother and sisters, was high on his list of priorities. You had to have been there, said Heinrich, to have seen the brutality of the anarchists, to fully appreciate the circumstances. Even so, some found it difficult to actually handle guns, so they carried big sticks, while one, Hermann Goertzen, felt he could only serve as a *Sanitaeter*.

The Hierschau *Selbstschutz*, including Heinrich Braun, practised throughout the summer of 1918, probably with increasing dedication when it became apparent that the German troops were soon to be withdrawn. At first only the 18 to 25 year olds participated, but since the numbers were then too small to really protect the



village, the age was expanded to include those up to 45 years, making a total of 60 or 70 men.

When the German troops had to withdraw from the Molotschna after the armistice to end World War I was signed, the Hierschau *Selbstschutz* lined up on the parade ground. The German officer, named Vogt, who had been training them, addressed the group. He announced that he had chosen the best one of the group, Heinrich Braun, to replace himself as commander, and advised the others to follow and obey him. Turning to Heinrich he continued, "If anyone can do it, you can!" A feather could have knocked Heinrich over, but since he doubted that anyone else would do it, he accepted the role as "*Fuehrer*." When the German troops left the area, he set about organizing the Hierschau force to make sure it would efficiently fulfill its mandate. Practising continued, special guard posts were set up for the night, and *Fuehrer* Braun, together with his bodyguard, made regular inspections.

The Hierschau *Selbstschutz* took seriously the defensive nature of its job. It stood by ready to defend against bandits but, as an example, did not go outside the village to join the more offensive battle against the Makhnowze at Chernigowka. According to Heinrich they did not actually shoot at, and certainly did not kill anyone, although he admitted that "the hate was there."

The *Selbstschutz* resistance eventually collapsed when the combined Red Army and the Makhnowze moved in from the north to occupy Gnadenfeld on March 11, 1919. General Dobenko of the Red Army promised that for three days his troops would plunder, but not kill in the Molotschna area. Members of the *Selbstschutz*, however, would be executed.<sup>3</sup> Heinrich Braun, together with many other members of the *Selbstschutz* either fled the region, or went into hiding. The Makhnowze appeared to be particularly interested in finding Heinrich, and made repeated sweeps through the village, most often at night. The Willms family took to sleeping in the forest at night because of these nocturnal visits, since they feared for their lives. But Heinrich had fled the area and was not to be found.

Eventually, with the appearance of the White Army commanded by Denikin in the region, the *Selbstschutz* members could return home or come out of hiding. Heinrich also rejoined his family. It is quite possible that during this time Heinrich was one of the Menonites who joined the White Army. He signed up for the artillery, seeing action as a gunner on an armoured train. Exactly where he was for the next few months is not known, but the following summer, Heinrich was back at home in Hierschau, apparently par-

ticipating in the management of the family *Wirtschaft*. After the battle in which the White Army, by then commanded by Wrangel, defeated the Red cavalry commanded by Zhloba on June 20, 1920, Heinrich was part of the crew which cleaned up the dead bodies in the Hierschau area.

With the White Army again occupying the region, a small aerodrome was established on the pasture just north of Hierschau. Perhaps because of this proximity, Heinrich, together with three others, signed up with the White Airforce. Their job was to guard the aircraft. To be quite honest, Heinrich admitted, he thought that this service could be fulfilled well away from the front line fighting, of which he had seen enough by then.

But the vicissitudes of war again caught up with Heinrich. After a pitched battle on October 15, Wrangel's White Army had to retreat from the area. Heinrich and his mother had a tearful farewell. He told her not to cry, that she should bake cookies for his birthday on October 17, he would be back in two days. She, probably sensing a permanent parting, asked him not to forget to pray. A bullet might hit him, and then where would he be? He remarked that bullets would not hit him, he would dodge them. And so Heinrich left home, and together with the White Army slowly retreated back into the Crimea.

One cold November morning, with the Reds rapidly approaching, the crews were not able to start their aircraft. They poured gasoline over 27 airplanes and set them on fire, so that the advancing Reds would not capture them intact. Then they themselves fled ever southwards. Heinrich and his friends fled through Simferopol to the port city of Sevastopol. Together with two others from Hierschau, Aaron Neufeld and Peter Goertzen, and many White officers, he boarded a ship. The ship then pulled out of the harbour to avoid being shelled by the Red artillery.

However, the problems were not yet over. No country wanted to accept the shipful of fleeing Whites for fear of offending the victorious Communist government of Russia. So they sailed around the Black Sea for a month, becoming ever hungrier as the days passed. In the meantime the senior officers on the ship contacted the League of Nations, and were advised to throw down their weapons and declare themselves refugees. Most of the guns were thrown into the sea, but when a Turk came out to the ship in a small boat, Heinrich traded his revolver for a piece of bread.

Eventually, carrying its load of refugees, the ship was able to navigate through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, around Greece and into the Adriatic Sea. They were taken off the ship in

Yugoslavia, and housed in an old, cold and windy castle. They received one bowl of thin bean soup a day as food. Their clothes were all steamed to get rid of the lice. After about one month, when the authorities had decided what to do with them, they were loaded onto stock cars and shipped inland by train. At one station the Red Cross handed out gifts to the refugees; Heinrich received a much needed shirt. After a few days of travel Heinrich and his friends reached Senta, a city in northern Yugoslavia, in a region that had formerly been part of Austria. Here they were quartered in the home of a Jewish family.

Initially there was considerable mutual distrust, but when the three Mennonite young men found that the Russian attitude of "Kill the Jews and save Russia" was really not relevant, they were more comfortable. Likewise, when the Jewish family was assured that the refugees were only interested in being able to live and work, and spoke German at that, they were at ease.

Heinrich and his two friends were served three square meals a day. For this, despite the fact that at the time they were not particularly religious, they paused, bowed their heads, and thanked God. The Jewish hostess eventually asked what they were doing before they started eating. When Heinrich explained that they were thanking God for the meal, she countered with the fact that she, and not God, was providing the meal. Heinrich replied that they were thanking God that he had made her willing to provide the meal, and besides, they had been trained to do this from childhood on.

After a month in Senta the men obtained work with farmers in the area, then also boarding with the farmers who employed them. Unfortunately none of the three had any official identification or passes. Eventually, first Aaron Neufeld, then Peter Goertzen were apprehended and jailed by the police on suspicion of being German spies. Aaron Neufeld was able to write a note to Heinrich, asking him to come as soon as possible, the authorities wanted to hang him! Heinrich, after finishing the chores the next morning, went into the city. He headed for the Jewish home in which they had originally stayed, to find out what jail his friends might be in. On the way he met Aaron Neufeld walking down the street, as happy as could be! In their investigation, the police had first contacted the White Army officers to see if there were German speaking men in their army. They were told that yes, indeed, there were many excellent German speaking soldiers in the White Army. Still not satisfied, the police went to the Jewish home where the men had previously been quartered. When they heard about the peculiar

practise of thanking God for meals, they had apparently said, "What? . . . then they likely believe in God." It was assumed that German spies would not believe in God. Both Aaron and Peter were released from jail and allowed to go wherever they wanted. Thereafter, all three men continued to work in various places in Yugoslavia, but they were more careful to take along identification papers when they travelled to other cities.

Eventually even the most interesting adventure becomes commonplace, so with time the excitement of having escaped from Russia wore off. At the time of their stay in Yugoslavia all three Hierschau men believed in God, and were nominal church members, but none considered themselves to be born again Christians. Now they promised God that if they ever got out of Yugoslavia, they would be born again and lead better lives. But God works through people.

While in Yugoslavia, Heinrich made efforts to contact his mother. He wrote home asking if it would be advisable to return. His mother replied with a letter written in her own hand, discussing all the mundane affairs of life, but not answering his question. Finally he noticed that there were words scibbled between the lines, which, when pieced together, said: "For God's sake, do not come home. They are still looking for you." Some time in 1924 Heinrich received the last letter from his mother. The first part was in her own familiar handwriting, but the last paragraph, added by someone else, told him that his mother had passed away. Now he knew with certainty that his course was not a return to his homeland, but likely emigration to America.

Peter Goertzen had uncles living in Henderson, Nebraska, and he contacted them. They were willing to sponsor him. Eventually first he, then Aaron Neufeld and finally Heinrich Braun were helped across the ocean to America. After a three year stay in Yugoslavia, Heinrich travelled through Austria and Switzerland, across France, finally sailing from Cherbourg. He landed in New York, and still having some spirit of adventure, went to Boston for a week and Chicago for a few days before heading for Henderson, Nebraska.

Heinrich and his two friends worked on farms at or near Henderson. Aaron Neufeld first worked on the farm of G. Goertzen, then in 1927 moved to Enid, Oklahoma. For a time he worked as a salesman at a meat packing plant. He was killed in a truck-train accident on January 19, 1940, at the age of 41 years.<sup>4</sup> Peter Goertzen stayed in the Henderson area. On April 12, 1925, he married a local girl and settled down on a farm. The Goertzens had a family

and continued to farm until about 1975, when illness forced Peter's retirement. He died on November 26, 1981.<sup>5</sup>

Heinrich Braun followed through on his promise to God following his rescue from Yugoslavia. After what he considered to be his true conversion to belief in Jesus Christ, he was baptized and accepted into the Henderson Mennonite Brethren Church in 1924, Rev. J. Abrams being the presiding minister.<sup>6</sup> Heinrich continued to work on farms in the area for a number of years.

Heinrich's mother, Gerturde Willms, had died in Hierschau on July 18, 1924. The rest of the family made plans to emigrate to Canada, with all except one brother (Gerhard Willms could not leave Russia because he was of military age), arriving in October of 1926. They first stayed in the Rosthern, Saskatchewan area, then later moved to Namaka, Alberta.

Heinrich came to visit his brothers and sisters in Canada soon after they arrived. While in Saskatchewan, he became acquainted with Tina Kroeker, whose parents lived on a farm in Bruderfeld. They were married on April 15, 1929, the couple settling on a farm, also in the Bruderfeld area. They had three children:

John	b. March 11, 1930
Leonard	b. October 23, 1932
Alice	b. October 23, 1934

While the fellowship in the Bruderfeld Mennonite Brethren Church was a sustaining influence in the family, the farming was at times difficult. Pastures across the Manitoba border seemed to be greener, so in 1949 the Brauns purchased a farm near Alexander, Manitoba. Some of the land was low lying, but when the Assiniboine River did not flood, the crops were often excellent. Using his ingenuity, Heinrich built a fish trap, which he placed in the river, so that the family could often include fish on the menu. Deer and other game was quite plentiful, Heinrich and the boys having little trouble in providing the occasional venison steak for the table.

After a struggle with cancer of the breast for about ten years, which began with an operation while they still lived in Bruderfeld, Tina succumbed to further spread of the tumour. She died on January 3, 1953. Tina's practical love and management of the household was missed by her family and friends.

Heinrich found another helpmate in Margaret Schroeder of Main Centre, Saskatchewan. They were married on October 11, 1953, and continued to live on the farm in Alexander.

Late in 1959, probably feeling that at 64 years of age, Heinrich had put in enough years of back-breaking labour, the Brauns moved to Winnipeg. Here they joined the North Kildonan Mennonite Brethren Church, and soon enjoyed the fellowship in the church and with other friends and relatives. But tragedy was to stalk Heinrich even further down his path of life. After a relatively brief struggle with cancer, his wife Margaret died on June 29, 1972. Heinrich continued to live out his retirement alone. He frequently visited family and friends and often brought them gifts which he had made himself, such as little stools, tables or shelves. He could never resist a bargain, and was seen walking the streets of Winnipeg with his newly acquired purchases. His home continued to be, as his farms had been, a pack rat's paradise.

Eventually, because he was unable to manage in his own home, he was admitted to a senior citizens home in Boissevain, Manitoba, then transferred to Donwood Manor in Winnipeg. Here he died on May 28, 1983, at the age of 87 years.<sup>7</sup> His funeral was on June 1 in the North Kildonan Mennonite Brethren Church, Pastor Roland Marsch and an old friend, Rev. Peter Derksen, presiding.

So was laid to rest, after a long and active life, the Son of the Revolution, a man who had lived through and actively participated in one of the most interesting, yet devastating chapters of modern world and Mennonite history. Despite often desperate circumstances, he had managed to dodge the bullets, and perhaps because of these desperate circumstances, he had continued to pray. Heinrich had kept the promises he had made to his mother.

## XIV THE FAMINE\*

Many factors combined to bring about the famine conditions in southern Russia in the early 1920s. The region most seriously affected was the lower Volga basin, but the area north of the Black Sea, including the Molotschna and Chortitza Mennonite colonies, also had widespread famine.

### The Causes

Years of civil war, with the region changing hands on a number of occasions, had severely depleted the resources of many Mennonite *Wirtschaften*. Horses in particular had been requisitioned on many occasions, since they were the most common means of transportation, both for advancing and for retreating troops. Sparrau, for example, had only 53 horses for 49 *Wirtschaften*, while the 19 landless households had a total of five.<sup>1</sup> In earlier years each *Wirtschaft* would have had a complement of eight to twelve horses. The number of cows was also depleted in many areas, Sparrau having a total of 84, about 1.2 per household. The weakend horses and cows often shared plow pulling duties, and where neither were available, the land was dug up by hand or worked with hoes.<sup>2</sup> Other farm machinery had also been requisitioned or redistributed, so that all animals and equipment needed for the efficient running of a *Wirtschaft* were in short supply.

Certainly in Russian and Ukrainian villages, and to some extent among the Mennonites, many of the young men, the bread-winners of the family, had either been killed or had fled. Management of the farm operation presented a problem to those remaining. In many Mennonite villages, much of the actual farm labour had been done by hired hands; the economic and social circumstances now made it difficult to continue this practice.

What profits could be made were nullified by rampant inflation, the high prices making it impossible to purchase anything without a wheelbarrow full of money. Jakob and Elisabeth Koop described the inflation in Russia at the time, "I would have written sooner, but to send a letter costs 40,000R. Now we can sell a pound of butter for 300,000R, then we can write. Flour costs 10 million rubles per pud, who can buy it?"<sup>3</sup> Cats, presumably not primarily used as pets, sold for one million rubles.<sup>4</sup>

With circumstances already difficult, drought conditions in 1921 and 1922 aggravated the situation even more. Yields were

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\*Commonly called *Hungersnot* by the Mennonites



low, with farmers often barely harvesting the amount of grain they had sown. Sometimes the seed just seemed to lie there without any evident growth.

Added to the lack of animals and equipment, to inflation and drought, was what appeared to be a deliberate Soviet policy to destroy the agriculture and starve the people of the area into submission by a system of heavy taxation.<sup>5</sup> Much of what did grow was demanded either as cash (requiring that the grain be sold) or in kind. This often left the farmers entirely without grain, even seed grain, and made it impossible to continue the farming operation. The flourishing model farms of the Molotschna, including those of Hierschau, became little more than a group of buildings on the flat, parched steppes of southern Russia. The people were hungry.

### Description

A report written by H. Goossen graphically described the situation:

The crop in the village of Alexandertal was very poor. The winter grain, because of insufficient moisture, came up in only a few places. . . . They already had trouble finding seed for the winter seeding. Then came the government demands, then the military. Those who did not have the fortune to have grain to barter promptly, have already been hungry a long time. At the present time the whole village is hungry except for about 10 families, and they have food for only a short time. The situation in Schardau is no better. At this time two farmers are on their deathbeds due to starvation. Nothing can be purchased even with large amounts of money. Over 50% of the people are starving in Hamberg, Klippenfeld and Hierschau. It is somewhat better in several other villages . . . but there are many beggars, then the military . . . Waldheim is the worst off . . . four men died of starvation in Waldheim, one in Klippenfeld. Many are sick in many of the villages. Even in villages where the crop is good there is starvation, the reason being that all was taken, so that we cannot do without help.<sup>6</sup>

Jakob J. Willms of Hierschau recalls that his parents were so weakened by hunger that they spent considerable time in bed, giving the food to their ten children. People roasted ground squirrels over the fire, the farm pest becoming a source of much needed protein.<sup>7</sup> The Johann Willms household picked through the straw



# AREA OF FAMINE IN THE SOVIET UNION 1921 - 1922

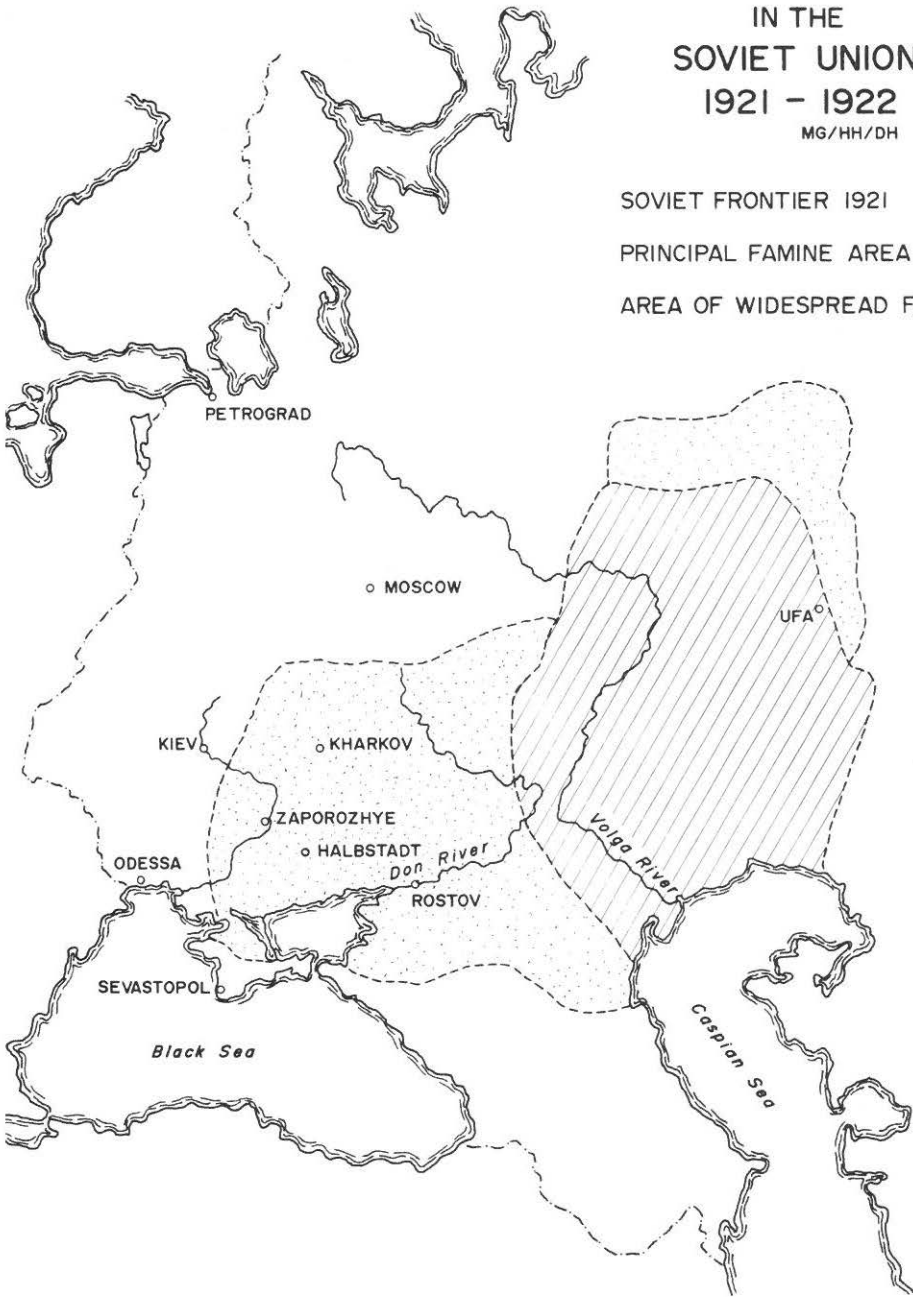
MG/HH/DH

SOVIET FRONTIER 1921

PRINCIPAL FAMINE AREA

AREA OF WIDESPREAD FAMINE

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in their attic to find kernels of grain, at the same time separating out the mouse droppings from their meagre returns. Despite the desperate situation, not everyone totally succumbed to the circumstances. A sense of humour remained. Chickens were found hung up. Rumour had it that they had "committed suicide" because the government demanded more eggs than they could deliver!<sup>8</sup>

Other necessities of life were also soon in short supply, the most striking being clothing. According to Heinrich Bartsch:

Some families have very little. Some go the year round without shirts . . . especially the everyday clothes are almost gone . . . Anything that a farmer can save is needed for food, for taxes and for seed grain . . . In most villages there will be schools this winter — but under difficult circumstances . . . it will be almost impossible to have the necessary clothing for the children . . .<sup>9</sup>

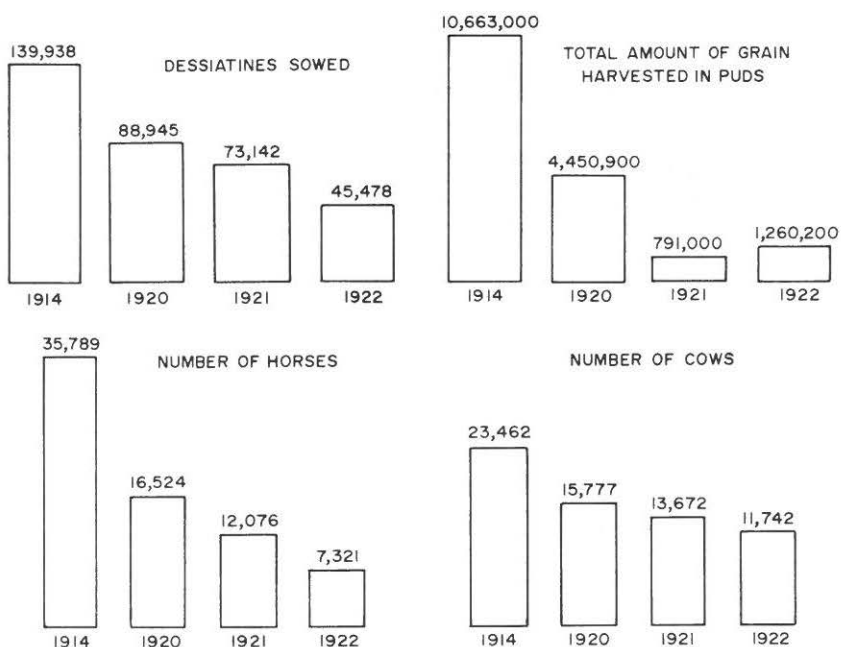
Many children simply could not leave their homes, particularly in winter, because they did not have enough clothing.

This was a time for improvisation. Mennonite soups traditionally were a collage of vegetables and meat. The variety of plants and animals to enter this parade expanded greatly. Weeds were suddenly edible, as were many small animals which were ordinarily ignored. The use of existing farm and garden crops was increased, for example watermelons were used to produce sugar, a commodity which could no longer be purchased. Almost anything could be ground up to produce flour. Clothing, previously tailored from cloth which was purchased, was now often made from homespun wool or silk.

Despite ingenuity which knew few limits, conditions went from bad to worse. In the Halbstadt area the need was great; seeding in 1922 was meager, with only 1/10 dessiatine per person planted.<sup>10</sup> A Mennonite Central Committee report of the Halbstadt *Wolost* conditions found that 326 individuals had actually died of starvation, and also illustrated the extremes to which people were driven to obtain food<sup>11</sup> (See Table XIX). In Gnadenfeld the situation was also critical, although probably not quite as desperate, with 61 people reported to have died of starvation. Statistics for all the Mennonite colonies in the Ukraine may seem like bare uninteresting numbers, but when these are translated into bare pantry shelves and empty stomachs, they are a numerical witness to the plight of the Mennonites in that area.<sup>12</sup>

TABLE XIX  
M.C.C. STATISTICS FOR THE HALBSTADT WOLOST

Starving	823 families
Died of starvation	326 individuals
Ate crows	469 families
Ate field mice	71 families
Ate horse meat	755 families
Ate cats	344 families
Ate dogs	184 families
Ate cattle which had died, either of disease or starvation	308 families
Ate leather	250 families (or more)



XX American Mennonite Relief Statistics regarding Agriculture of the Mennonites in the Ukraine

Source: P.C. Hiebert and Orie O. Miller, *Feeding the Hungry* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Central Committee, 1929), p. 212.

## Help

Hierschau farmers were traditionally quite independent and managed their farms efficiently. But even they were soon asking for help. The pages of the *Mennonitische Rundschau* were available for the Mennonites in America and Russia to inform each other, and they were soon filled with requests for aid, particularly in the summer of 1922.<sup>13</sup> At least 14 Hierschau families, totalling 75 people, requested help in the form of food drafts, often from specific friends or relatives in the United States or Canada (See Table XXI). During this time there was a considerable number of refugees from other Mennonite colonies living in the Molotschna, with some also staying in Hierschau. This swelled the number of families living in Hierschau well beyond the traditional 60, so that the families requesting aid probably represented about 20% of the population.

TABLE XXI  
REQUESTS FOR FOOD DRAFTS  
FROM HIERSCHAU PEOPLE  
DURING THE *HUNGERSNOT* IN 1922  
(*Mennonitische Rundschau* from April to August 1922)

Heinrich Franz Doerksen (7 persons)
Jakob Jakob Dueck (3 persons)
Peter F. Dueck (12 persons)
Heinrich Duerksen (6 persons)
Johann Johann Fast (4 persons)
Jakob Peter Hildebrand (5 persons)
Johann P. Hildebrand (5 persons)
Abraham Heinrich Huebner (5 persons)
Gerhard Kornelius Kroeker (5 persons)
Johann J. Siemens (2 persons)
Maria Heinrich Thiessen (1 person)
Kornelius Wall (6 persons)
Gerhard Warkentin (9 persons)
Helena Wedel (5 persons)

But the American Mennonites did not restrict their activities to sending food drafts. A relief agency, the Mennonite Central Committee (M.C.C.) had been established in 1920 to enable more effec-

tive combined action by all Mennonites.<sup>14</sup> Through the help of the American Relief Administration, the M.C.C. was able to negotiate with the Soviet authorities the possibility of delivering relief supplies to areas in the Soviet Union where there were large concentrations of Mennonites.<sup>15</sup> A number of workers were sent by the M.C.C. to help in the coordination and delivery of the widespread relief efforts, among them being Orie Miller, Arthur Slagel, David M. Hofer and Clayton Kratz.<sup>16</sup>

With the promise of food supplies, each village in the Molotschna elected a committee, which then appointed the specific people who were to help in the project. A kitchen was set up in each village, with a dining room in which prepared meals were served. Everyone was categorized according to need, for example a person with a work horse or a milk cow required less help than someone who had nothing. First to be considered were children, pregnant women, the sick and elderly.

Produce also had to be delivered to the villages from the train stations. In the spring of 1922 the roads were virtually impassable, so it required tremendous effort, particularly since the horses were already in a weakened state, to transport the goods.

The first shipment of food arrived in Halbstadt on March 14, 1922, and the first kitchens were opened by March 20.<sup>17</sup> Relief arrived in the Gnadenfeld *Wolost* on March 25, with 30 kitchens eventually being established throughout the district, feeding 3,500 people daily.<sup>18</sup>

An M.C.C. kitchen was also set up in Hierschau, at the Johann Stobbe *Wirtschaft*, No. 14, with a number of Hierschau people also working in it. Kornelius Loewen, originally from Berdiansk, helped distribute food and other relief goods in his new home of Hierschau. He eventually became secretary of the Gnadenfeld *Wolost* Committee of the American Mennonite Relief.<sup>19</sup> In the Gnadenfeld *Wolost* the average number of people fed was about 117 per kitchen. Statistics for each kitchen, and probably Hierschau as well, may have matched those of Ohrloff, where 114 were fed per day. It was reported that Ohrloff fed 63 children, 27 women and old people, 10 sick and 14 starving men, as well as kitchen staff and the members of the local committee. Need tended to be greater in the industrial centres of Halbstadt and Waldheim, also in the larger towns like Landskrone and Gnadenfeld.<sup>20</sup>

Rations given at the kitchens consisted of rice, porridge, beans, milk and cocoa with white bread. According to the M.C.C. statistics, the total number of people in the Mennonite colonies of the Ukraine was 75,988, of which 49,152 (64.7%) were classified as

starving. At the peak of the feeding project, June and July 1922, daily meals were given to 14,535 children and 10,412 adults, for a total of 24,947. In October this was reduced to 12,453, but increased again by the end of the year to 15,450.<sup>21</sup>

Other physical needs were also helped by the M.C.C. The original shipment of goods to arrive in the Molotschna consisted of eight train carloads of food, but also six carloads of clothing.<sup>22</sup> The large bales of clothing were then sent to the villages and distributed among the needy.

But some of the aid was intended to allow the Russian Mennonites to help themselves. The American Mennonites sent a number of Fordson tractors to the Ukraine to facilitate farm operations. They arrived in late 1922, but since it was too late to start field work at that time, the tractors were not fully operational until the spring of 1923. In all, 24 tractors worked in the Molotschna, in four groups of six each, two such groups in the Halbstadt *Wolost*, two in the Gnadenfeld region. According to a report published by G.G. Hiebert:

... steps were taken to employ the necessary personnel. The best drivers were chosen from the list of candidates ... then also helpers and apprentices. ... March 16 the plowing began, initially with five tractors ... on March 26, all 24 were operating. The fuel had previously been distributed to the individual villages. The two blade American Oliver plows were soon replaced by the local four, five and six bladed Buggers principally because the wider furrows allowed a greater area to be covered.<sup>23</sup>

Altogether 796 dessiatines (2,147.5 acres) were plowed in the Molotschna. In Hierschau a total of 39¼ dessiatines were plowed, a small patch for each farmer. When they plowed in Hierschau the ground was quite sticky, so a person was assigned to stand at each end of the furrow to knock the mud off the plow.<sup>24</sup>

Unfortunately the work of the tractors was limited by inadequate supplies of fuel. Farmers who had their own supply, or were able to purchase fuel, could have additional land cultivated. But with a demand for fuel, inflation put the price out of reach for most people. Initial cost was 54 million rubles per pud in April, but that rose to 188 million rubles by July of 1923. Despite the inflationary spiral of fuel prices, despite some fear that the tractors might damage the farm machinery, it was noted that they worked well and efficiently. During the summer of 1923, in part because of the work of the tractors, the people became more optimistic. "After

the harvest, most of the people will be able to eat their own bread, and if the taxes in kind are not too high, they will have enough . . ." reported G.G. Hiebert in July of 1923.<sup>25</sup>

## Thanks

With gradual improvement of the circumstances, the people no longer needed to worry about where the next slice of bread was to come from. In evaluating the situation, many realized that they would not have survived had the American and other European Mennonites not promptly delivered such massive relief supplies. There was a genuine outpouring of gratitude by the Russian Mennonites to their brothers and sisters. The Halbstadt *Wolost* Committee wrote, "We, the citizens of the village of Halbstadt, decided at today's meeting that we should express our deepfelt gratitude to the Mennonites in America for the clothing and food we have received."<sup>26</sup> Gerhard Plett, as *Aeltester* of the Margenau — Landskrone — Alexanderwohl *Gemeinde* expressed similar thanks, "We, dear brothers and sisters, cannot repay your good deeds, but can ask the Lord, the giver of all good gifts, that he reward you. . . ." <sup>27</sup>

## D.M. Hofer and Revival

David M. Hofer, one of the M.C.C. representatives who helped distribute food and other goods in the Molotschna area, also noted the spiritual needs of the people. After the most acute physical needs had been tended to, he held a series of evangelistic meetings. There was a tremendous response.<sup>28</sup> In January of 1923, he held a series of meetings in Waldheim, to which many of the Hierschau people went. Hofer reported that every evening the Lord added a small group of repentant sinners, in the first four evenings there were 167. With extension of the meetings for a longer period, this eventually rose to 300.<sup>29</sup> A revival swept through the Mennonite colonies of South Russia, including a substantial number of people from Hierschau who came closer to God through this ministry.

After his return home, D.M. Hofer published a book describing his experiences in Russia, both as an M.C.C. worker and as evangelist, called *Die Hungersnot in Russland und Unsere Reise um die Welt* (*The Famine in Russia and Our Journey Around the World*).<sup>30</sup> This book included a section entitled, "A mosaic, or brightly coloured stones, gathered on the steppes of South Russia" which contained poetry and other writings by the Mennonites of Russia. They often expressed their gratitude to God and his people, who had so graciously provided both physical and spiritual

sustenance in their time of great need. A number of people from Hierschau contributed to this portion of the book.

\* \* \*

After a difficult time lasting a number of years, we now can, through the Grace of God, breathe a bit easier as we look into the future. . . . Had not the brothers and sisters from America and Holland come to our aid, many Menonites as well as those of other confessions of faith would have died of starvation . . . as in the physical, so in the spiritual realm we have gone through difficult times . . . the difficult circumstances have in time caused some true Christians to stumble . . . suddenly in the last winter, a great revival swept through the colonies . . . and many a person regained his faith. . . . Our prayer to God is that his punishment of our people may not have been in vain. . . .

*Aeltester* Gerhard Plett  
June 10, 1923<sup>31</sup>

\* \* \*

We were rich in material goods, and also thought we were rich in things that moths and rust could not destroy . . . yet our Lord in his Grace knew what he wanted to do with our people, and had to show love by punishing us . . . the beautiful automobiles, the horses, the wagons with springs, the clothing, yes finally the daily bread was taken from us. Has God now achieved what he wished to accomplish?

. . . During the civil war . . . when the windows rattled from the thunder of cannons we asked God for mercy . . . but we stayed with the old. Then came the famine. The small pieces of bread became smaller and finally disappeared. We cried to the Lord in our distress . . . help came through the A.M.R. . . . and we forgot too often. Then this January there were evening services in Waldheim. . . . The Lord has his harvest . . . my wife and I can now say, 'By Grace we have also experienced renewal . . .'

Teacher Johann A. Goerz  
June 6, 1923<sup>32</sup>

\* \* \*



Jakob Duerksen, former *Schulze* of Hierschau and *Oberschulze* of the Gnadenfeld *Wolost*, died on May 22, 1922, so he could not contribute to the book, although he did receive some help from America before he died. His widow and two children, however, did participate.

Slowly but surely death through famine stretched its skeletal hand out to the Mennonite people. With a heavy heart my dear husband, who lay sick at the time, saw it approach. . . . Much was said about help, but it just did not come . . . but finally help actually did arrive. . . . I was able to share of it with my sick husband. Then he soon went to his heavenly home without being able to realize his hope of emigrating. I commend the verse (. . . whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me . . . Matthew 25:40) to all of you dear brothers who have sent food drafts to Russia.

Widow Elisabeth Duerksen  
May, 1923<sup>33</sup>

\* \* \*

. . . In this discussion I would like to move from physical bread which you, dear brothers, have sent us, to the other, the heavenly bread — the Word of God. But I do not wish to downgrade the importance of your physical help, but rather assure you that your efforts, in brotherly love, will stand as an everlasting monument in the history of the Mennonites. . . .

David Duerksen  
May, 1923<sup>34</sup>

\* \* \*

*Wir haben Ihn treu erfunden,  
Koennt man nur sagen wie!  
Man moecht' die Knie beugen  
Und immer nur bezeugen:  
'Es mangelte uns nie'* (first of eight stanzas)  
(We have found Him to be true  
If only we could say how!  
One would like to bend one's knees  
And always confirm  
'We never were in need.')

Maria Jakob Duerksen  
May, 1923<sup>35</sup>

\* \* \*

*Gott nimmt sich der Suender so freundlich an,  
Durch ihn habt auch ihr an uns viel getan.  
Dieses Blatt sei ihm und euch geweiht  
Als Gegengeschenk fuer die Liebe in Leid.*

(second of three stanzas)

(God gladly accepts sinners,  
Through him you have helped us so much.  
This page is dedicated to him and to you  
As a return gift for your love in our time of need.)

Heinrich and Maria Penner  
June, 1923<sup>36</sup>

\* \* \*

Is it really here? Really here, the American Mennonite Relief? . . . The Gnadenfeld *Wolost* Committee of the A.M.R. was bombarded by such and similar questions in the second half of March, 1922, by the many hundreds of hungry and malnourished people. Only those who have seen and experienced it can imagine the expressions of joy and thanks on the faces of the suffering which accompanied the establishment, after March 25, of 30 kitchens which served 3,500 people in our *Wolost*. About 15,000 kilograms of products were distributed to the somewhat under 13 thousand people of our *Wolost* between March 25, 1922 and June 1, 1923 . . . as a result the number dying of starvation after the establishment of the A.M.R. remained at 61 in our *Wolost*, and today we all have enough to eat.

It is wonderful how God allows his love to be shown to his children, once through ravens, another time through brothers who live thousands of miles away . . .

Kornelius Loewen  
Secretary of the Gnadenfeld  
*Wolost* Committee of  
the A.M.R.  
June, 1923.<sup>37</sup>

\* \* \*

A people of the New World helps a people of the Old World in a time of need . . . formerly where a *Vollwirt* was able to provide sustenance for hundreds of people, he now had to obtain his rations at a Relief Kitchen. This

was all provided by our brothers in the faith, the Mennonites of America. They spared neither effort nor hard work; whatever difficulties there were, they did not want their brothers in Russia to starve. . . . God has added his blessing. To him be praise and thanks. To you, dear friends, we can only add 'May God reward you'.

Heinrich G. Wiebe  
Secretary of the *Wolost*  
Committee of the A.M.R.  
June 9, 1923.<sup>38</sup>

\* \* \*

There was also the unofficial reaction to the relief work of M.C.C. as well as to the evangelistic campaigns of David M. Hofer. One of the theme songs of the Hofer meetings was "*Wenn wir von dieser Erde*" (When we from this Earth).<sup>39</sup> The chorus was obviously repeated very often and was well known in the area:

<i>O suesses Heim</i>	(O sweet home
<i>droben in der ew'gen Ruh!</i>	Up there in the everlasting
	rest)

The street urchins in Hierschau sang a slight modification which skillfully, in one phrase, combined references to both the practical and the religious help the Mennonites of Russia had received.

<i>O suesses Heim</i>	(O sweet home
<i>droben in dem Zuckersack</i> <sup>40</sup>	Up there in the sack of
	sugar)

\* \* \*

And so the people of Hierschau expressed thanks to their brothers in America, who had so generously provided, probably saving many of their lives. A number also implied that God had spoken, and severely reprimanded his people in Russia for having been too materialistic, and hoped that now they had learned their lesson. In the hearts of some there was a glimmer of hope, that things would now improve. *Aeltester* Gerhard Plett reported, "This year we had a very wet, rainy month of May, and have, through the help of our foreign brothers, been able to sow some crops, so that we now hope in the future to again eat our own bread."<sup>41</sup>



## XV TILL WE MEET AGAIN

### Refugees

Hierschau had not been the site of major destruction or mass murders during the civil war, as a matter of fact a fair number of people had sought refuge in the village during the time of unrest. Rempel and Bauer, reporting on the situation in the Gnadenfeld *Wolost*, recorded 2,162 refugees, of which about 1,800 were without means, staying in the small rooms, machine sheds and summer kitchens of the 27 villages.<sup>1</sup> Hierschau had its share of these refugees. Some, like the Johann Thiessen family, had found life on a separate estate too dangerous. In 1918 they moved to Hierschau, buying *Wirtschaft* No. 23. Others, such as the Gerhard Kroekers, came from the more outlying colonies, in their case Terek, to the comfort of the larger concentration of Mennonites and possibly more stable conditons of the Molotschna, also in 1918. The Leonard Sudermanns, a young couple from Berdiansk, stayed in the *Nebenhaus* of the Johann Willms farm for a time, then moved on to Waldheim. A number, such as Kornelius Loewen, who became secretary of the Gnadenfeld A.M.R. Committee, and Jakob Friesen, for a time choir conductor, played an active part in Hierschau village life. Table XXII is a list, likely very incomplete, of those people known to have moved to Hierschau during the period of unrest.<sup>2</sup>

### TABLE XXII

#### LIST OF FAMILIES KNOWN TO HAVE MOVED TO HIERSCHAU DURING THE PERIOD OF UNREST

Jakob J. Dueck (3 persons) — asked for food drafts in 1922.

Johann H. Epp (12 persons) — came from Blumenfeld. Lived in Hierschau 1919-20. Moved to Rueckenau.

Jakob Fast (2 persons) and mother Justina Fast

Jakob J. Friesen (5 persons) — from Herzenberg, though originally from Wiesenfeld. Was choir conductor.

Ben Janz (3 persons)

Gerhard Kroeker (3 persons) — from Terek about 1918.

Kornelius Loewen (6 persons) — from Berdiansk about 1920. Secretary of Gnadenfeld A.M.R. Committee. To Tiege to teach in 1923.

Gerhard Penner family (probably 4) — Widow Penner with three children moved to Hierschau after Gerhard Penner died.

Jakob Reimer (about 5 persons) — from Wiesenfeld at same time as Jakob Friesens. Moved away before emigration started.

Leonard Sudermann (4 persons) and brother Johann Sudermann — from Berdiansk about 1920. Moved to Waldheim likely late 1922.

Johann Thiessen (6 persons) — moved from estate and bought *Wirtschaft* No. 23 in about 1918.

Kornelius Wall (6 persons) — asked for food drafts in 1922.

## Emigration

With alleviation of the hunger pangs in 1923, helped to a considerable degree by M.C.C. relief, but also by improving agricultural conditions, the spirit among the Mennonites in Russia improved. They could now look beyond the desperate search for the next crust of bread to a long-term solution to their problems. Some felt that with proper organization, and with concerted efforts to improve relations with, and possibly obtain (or regain) concessions from the government, things would slowly improve. Many people of Hierschau were in this category.

Other people watched developments and saw, inspite of slightly improved circumstances, not light at the end of the tunnel, but signs of impending doom. The *Wirtschaft*, fundamental unit of Mennonite agricultural existence, fell prey to government policies. The *Vollwirtschaften* of Hierschau were divided in half, the additional land was given to others at the discretion of the local authorities. In 1915 there had been 30 *Vollwirtschaften* with 64.4 dessiatines land each, and 24 *Kleinwirtschaften* with 14.8 dessiatines. In 1926, obviously after the division, there were 22 *Wirtschaften* with 32 dessiatines, 26 with 16 dessiatines each.<sup>3</sup> The schools, important tools in the religious training of children, were

recognized as such by the government. Steps were taken to negate Christian influence and to use them to propogate Communist philosophy. A report from the Soviet Union in 1923 described the situation:

In order to be certain that there will be a socialistic atmosphere in the schools, all teachers have recently had to submit to an examination. Many of those whose position was too conservative were released from their positions . . . Teachers who teach the Word of God in school and who secretly agitate against the Soviet government, are to be exposed and released from their positions. . . .<sup>4</sup>

Kornelius Martens, director of the vocational school in Gnadenfeld, was one such teacher who was released from his position, presumably because of his religious beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

The government, either as a general policy, or perhaps through capricious local officials, periodically interrogated, imprisoned or even executed those who were in the way. The incarceration and execution of some of the local religious and political leaders, which occurred in Waldheim in January of 1922, was such an instance.

Continued heavy taxation, in kind or in money, was a heavy burden. With poor crops in the eastern part of the Molotschna in the summer of 1926 due to drought, Waldheim, Hierschau and Landskrone were particularly hard hit. In many instances the yield did not even equal the amount of seed. Yet the taxes continued unabated, causing a Hierschau farmer to complain, "I am supposed to pay 76 rubles in taxes, but have harvested barely 65 pud wheat."<sup>6</sup> Presumably this was an economically impossible situation.

These and other similar circumstances brought an increasing number of Mennonites to the realization, that if there was a future for them as a cohesive group, it might well lie outside the borders of the Soviet Union.

## Organizing for Departure

With the increasingly difficult circumstances before, during and after World War I, the Mennonites of Russia held a series of joint meetings. They wished to have more united action as well as a stronger voice when dealing with the government and its agencies. An organizing conference was held in 1910; then a follow-up meeting in 1912 established the *Kommission fuer Kirchenangelegenheiten* (Commission for Church Affairs), commonly abbreviated as KfK. Activities were suspended during the period of

anarchy, but when the Mennonite constituency caught its breath as circumstances stabilized to some degree, a conference was held at Alexanderwohl, Molotschna, on February 19, 1921. It was decided to create a new agency which would concern itself mainly with the problem of induction of Mennonite young men into the Red Army. B.B. Janz, a little-known teacher from Tiege, was elected head of this agency, the *Verband der Mennoniten Sued-Russlands* (V.M.S.R., Union of South Russian Mennonites). Immediately Janz obtained, with the help of the chairman of the meeting (probably *Aeltester* Gerhard Plett), a solemn vow that the Mennonite constituency uphold the principle of non-violence.<sup>7</sup>

The V.M.S.R. set out to accomplish its task, but could not long remain uninvolved in other problems looming large on the Mennonite horizon. Janz and others helped in negotiations which allowed the American and Dutch relief efforts to reach the Russian Mennonites in 1922 and 1923. At the same time they approached the government about the catastrophic conditions in the Mennonite colonies, and were assured that the central government did not wish to see the historic minority cultures of Russia destroyed. They did not expect the land division in the Mennonite colonies to proceed, since these still had a future cultural value and might provide worthwhile models for agricultural development.<sup>8</sup> While the V.M.S.R. continued to negotiate for improved conditions and development in the Mennonite colonies, it could not ignore the increasing sentiment of many, that emigration was the only permanent solution. Using the argument that the presence of a large number of refugees and landless in the area only impeded further agricultural development, the V.M.S.R. presented the Central Executive Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party with a petition requesting permission for these people to emigrate. Circumstances cited as reasons for the emigration included wanton destruction of farms by banditry, requisitioning of grain, the poor harvest of 1921, complete lack of agricultural equipment, quartering of troops in the area, all aggravated by the caprice of local government officials.<sup>9</sup> At the first congress of the V.M.S.R. held in Margenau on January 3 to 4, 1922, the proposal to resettle the starving portions of the Mennonite population to America or Holland was accepted. While this was a partial answer, the actual underlying sentiment appeared to be that the only longterm solution for ALL of the Mennonites was emigration.<sup>10</sup> From this point onward the policies and work of the V.M.S.R. were a finely balanced paradox — preparing plans and programs to help in the economic reconstruction of the area, yet working actively to prepare the way



for massive emigration.

Official government recognition of the V.M.S.R., however, still had to be obtained. In negotiations with the government it became apparent that there were objections to the "South Russian" part of the name, as well as the religious implication of "Mennonite." The name was therefore, partly at the suggestion of some officials, changed to *Verband der Buerger Hollandischer Herkunft* (V.B.H.H., Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage). The new charter gave the V.B.H.H. a broad range of economic concessions, including permission for Mennonites to continue independent farming, although with land holdings of only up to 32 dessiatines.<sup>11</sup>

During the summer of 1922, B.B. Janz asked prominent Mennonite leaders in the Ukraine to record their reasons for endorsing or rejecting the idea of emigration. National and social tensions, that is, minority discrimination, was frequently mentioned as a reason for favouring emigration. Widespread economic devastation of the colonies, with physical violence, disease and capricious government policies were commonly cited factors. Curtailment of religious freedom, as typified by forced conscription of Mennonite young men into the Red Army, and later by direct interference with religious training in schools, was also mentioned in 1922.<sup>12</sup> As the years progressed the latter feeling seemed to intensify, by 1926 perhaps being the dominant reason for emigration.

Ukrainian and Central government officials in the Soviet Union appeared to be open to negotiating at least a limited emigration, but obviously the Mennonites would have to find a country to emigrate to. Paraguay declared itself willing to accept newcomers, but many Mennonites were not sure they wished to go there. Canada, despite its rumoured severity of climate, seemed to be a possible haven, but an Order-in-Council passed in 1919 barred the entry of Mennonites. After representations by a Mennonite delegation to the new Liberal government of William Lyon Mackenzie King, the offending Order-in-Council was repealed on June 2, 1922. The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization was established, with the hard working and well respected David Toews of Rosthern, Saskatchewan, being appointed chairman. Contacts were made with the Canadian Pacific Railway, which eagerly awaited any opportunity to help colonize Canada. Colonel J.S. Dennis acted on behalf of the C.P.R. in many of its negotiations.<sup>13</sup> The European connection, in the meantime, was B.H. Unruh, who negotiated with the Dutch and German Mennonites, and with the governments when necessary. It should also be mentioned that our discussion has focused primarily on the situation in the Ukraine,

whereas similar developments were also occurring in other parts of the Soviet Union, where P. Froese and C.F. Klassen played roles similar to that which B.B. Janz fulfilled in the Ukraine.

With increasing talk of emigration, with declared willingness of Paraguay and Canada to accept refugees, and with the Ukrainian authorities actually granting exit visas, over 15,000 people declared themselves ready to depart. Many sold all their possessions and were eagerly waiting in the summer of 1922. But things were not quite that easy. A multitude of problems still had to be solved, including what to do with people who were rejected by Canada on medical grounds. Arrangements were eventually made for these people to be kept in a special camp in Lechfeld, Germany, supported by the German Mennonite Aid (D.M.H.). The road for emigration to Canada was finally cleared in mid 1923.

The first group of 726 emigrants, largely consisting of refugees and landless, left Chortitz on June 22, 1923, crossing the Soviet border at Sebez on July 1.<sup>14</sup> The scene of departure, with families and friends bidding each other tearful and often final farewells, will long be remembered by many people. A second departure occurred on July 2, another on July 13, with the last on July 24. Medical rejects, largely due to the eye disease, trachoma, became a problem, with almost a quarter of the emigrants being detained in Lechfeld. Stricter medical criteria had to be enforced, in the last minute separating some of the families.<sup>15</sup>

Initially emigration had been possible only through lists prepared by the V.B.H.H., but in early 1924 the way was also cleared for individual departure, provided the V.B.H.H. certified that a given family was registered on its lists. Eventually this became the only legal method of leaving Russia. Those who could, despite loss of property and inflation, still pay their way, did so. Those who were destitute were granted full or half credit by the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization during and after 1924. Initial terms of reference had favoured the refugees and landless; the shift to individual emigration allowed the wealthier colonists to consider leaving as well.<sup>16</sup>

In the meantime, there were those in America and Russia who felt that emigration to Mexico was the ideal solution. Aggressive land agents made appealing presentations, and the government had regulations in place which made emigration very easy. In all, perhaps 500 to 600 Russian Mennonites moved to Mexico from 1924 to 1926, some because they would have been medically rejected by Canada. Most eventually abandoned the three settlements which had been established, and moved to Canada a year or two later.<sup>17</sup>

But the gates which opened to allow emigration did not remain open for long. There was increasing resentment in Canada to the large-scale entrance of people who were industrious and progressive. The provincial and federal governments kept a nervous eye on general public sentiment.<sup>18</sup> It had also become obvious to the Soviet government that the prime purpose of emigration was not to reconstruct the Mennonite colonies, but simply to leave the country because of the political, religious and economic circumstances. With the implementation of the First Five Year Plan in the Soviet Union in 1928, the second drive toward socialism was introduced, together with further limitations on religious freedom. This was even less tolerable.

Now many Mennonites, previously wavering, were becoming desperate to leave. When it became known that 70 Siberian Mennonite families had obtained visas in Moscow, allowing them to depart for Canada in 1929, more soon arrived in the Soviet capital to try a similar procedure. By November 24, 13,000 Mennonites were camped in the Moscow suburbs. On November 25 Canada gave its final answer regarding willingness to receive the refugees — a shattering “No.” Despite difficult circumstances, Germany declared itself willing to accept about 5,000 refugees in three camps — Hammerstein, Moelln and Prenzlau. Of the 5,671 finally received, a total of almost 4,000 were Mennonites. Eventually most settled in Brazil, Paraguay and Canada (1,344), with some staying in Europe.<sup>19</sup> Many who remained in Moscow were sent back home, although they had nothing to return to. A number tried new channels of escape through western China, while others, mostly men, were exiled to labour camps.<sup>20</sup>

Table XXIII lists the number of Mennonites emigrating from the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>21</sup>

### Emigration from Hierschau

The predominant sentiment in Hierschau for much of the 1920s seemed in favour remaining in Russia. According to Jakob J. Willms, “it was not easy to interest Hierschau in emigration, although it was starting to improve a bit.” Johann Stobbe, for a time assistant to the *Schulze*, certainly did not wish to leave. He commented “No, I will stay in Russia, and still want to button up the vest of the Russians.” In all likelihood he died in prison.<sup>22</sup>

Despite resistance to the idea of emigration, a fair number of Hierschau people eventually did leave, including not only the refugees and landless, but also *Vollwirt* families. Three young men, Aaron F. Neufeld, Peter K. Goertzen and Heinrich Braun, fled with

TABLE XXIII  
EMIGRATION OF MENNONITES  
FROM THE SOVIET UNION

YEAR	CREDIT PASSENGERS	CASH PASSENGERS	TOTAL
Escaping prior to 1923, many as fleeing soldiers	—	—	About 500
1923	2,759	—	2,759
1924	3,894	1,154	5,048
1924-26 Mexico	—	—	About 500
1925	2,171	1,601	3,772
1926	2,479	3,461	5,940
1927	340	507	847
1928	408	103	511
1929	1,009	10	1,019
1930	294	11	305
1929-32 via camps in Germany	—	—	4,000
1930-33 via Harbin, China	—	—	About 800
Total			About 26,000
To Canada (directly or indirectly)			About 22,500

the retreating White Army in 1920, and eventually reached America. While 1924 was a year of major Mennonite migration, with 5,048 leaving the Soviet Union, Hierschau resistance to moving may well account for the fact that only the Heinrich Stobbe family left that year. In 1925, however, eleven family groups were represented in the 52 people who said farewell, and in 1926 another nine families with 48 individuals departed. Of the families leaving in 1925, the Jakob Willms (former *Schulze*) went via Mexico, possibly because some of the family members had trachoma, eventually joining the one son who had travelled directly to Canada in 1926. In 1927 only one straggler from a previously

# TABLE XXIV

## PEOPLE EMIGRATING FROM HIERSCHAU IN THE 1920s

- Aaron F. Neufeld, Peter K. Goertzen, Heinrich Braun — fleeing as soldiers — 1920.  
 Heinrich Stobbe (5 persons) — 1924.  
 Maria, Kornelius and Peter Stobbe — 1925.  
 Johann Thiessen (2) and Heinrich Thiessen — 1925.  
 Gerhard and Heinrich Penner (2) — 1925.  
 Gerhard Kroeker (7) — 1925.  
 Jakob J. Friesen (5) — 1925.  
 Jakob P. Neufeld (5) — 1925.  
 Johann A. Goerz (8) — 1925.  
 Maria Plett (Widow of Bernhard Plett) (3) — 1925.  
 David Duerksen (1) — 1925.  
 Jakob Willms (former *Schulze*) (12) — 1925. Eleven members of family first to Mexico for one year, then to Canada in 1926.  
 Abraham H. Huebner (4) — probably 1925.  
 Gerhard Neufeld (8) — 1926.  
 Franz Willms (3) — 1926.  
 Aron G. Wall and Willms family (9) — 1926.  
 Katharina Dyck (Widow of Peter Dyck) (12) — 1926.  
 Peter J. Spent (4) — 1926.  
 Helena and Hermann Goertzen (2) — 1926.  
 Kornelius J. Janzen (1) — 1926.  
 Jakob Stobbe (6) — 1926.  
 Johann J. Sukkau (3) — 1926.  
 Franz Dyck (son of Peter Dyck) (1) — 1927.  
 Heinrich Janz and Jakob Fast (5) — 1929 or 1930 — to Paraguay.  
 Heinrich Neufeld (1) — 1929 or 1930 — to Brazil.

departed family emigrated, with no one leaving in 1928. In 1929 at least six people must have joined the refugees clamoring for visas in Moscow, since the Heinrich Janz and Jakob Fast families reached the camp in Prenzlau, Germany. Eventually they emigrated to Paraguay, and Heinrich Neufeld, probably through similar circumstances, reached Brazil.

Of those who left Hierschau, at least five families would be classed as refugees, but in time uneasiness about conditions in the Soviet Union was not confined to those without property. At least

TABLE XXV  
EMIGRATION FROM HIERSCHAU BY YEAR

1920	3
1923	0
1924	5
1925	52
1926	48
1927	1
1928	0
1929 or 1930	6
TOTAL	<hr/> 115

seven *Vollwirt* families also departed. These people, of course, tried to sell their farms, if nothing else than to finance their trips to the new homeland. The Johann Willms family was successful in selling *Wirtschaft* No. 30 to the Johann Beckers when they left in 1926. The widow of Bernhard Plett and two young children left for Canada in 1925, leaving some of the older children to sell the farm. They unfortunately had trouble finding a purchaser, and by the time they were ready to leave, opportunities for emigration had ceased.

In total at least 115 people eventually left Hierschau, representing about 26 families and roughly a quarter of the population (See Tables XXIV and XXV).<sup>23</sup> This departure is in part reflected in the population statistics of Hierschau. In 1915 there were 427 Mennonites living in 62 establishments; this decreased to 373 by 1926.<sup>24</sup> Presumably some of the Mennonite *Wirtschaften* were then occupied by non-Mennonites.

When they left Hierschau, most emigrants probably embarked from the Stulnewo railroad station, then travelled on to Moscow, cash passengers on coaches, credit passengers on freight cars. Some still had to obtain their visas in Moscow, such as the Aron Wall and Johann Willms families. The anticipated cost of 50 rubles for each visa had suddenly increased to 250 rubles, but by then they were willing to pay almost any price. From there the trek continued on by train, through the "Red Gate" on the Latvian border to the port city of Riga. Here they could finally breathe a collective sigh of relief! As a rule the journey continued after a few days, by ship across the Baltic Sea, through the Kiel Canal, to England. Many

travelled across England by train to either Southampton or Liverpool, then by ocean liner to various ports in eastern Canada. Relatively few people from Hierschau were detained because of failure to pass the Canadian medical examination. Most members of the Jakob Willms family did take a detour through Mexico for one year because of trachoma. Elisabeth Braun was delayed in England for a number of months because she was suspected of having the disease.

Of those families where the specific route is known, six landed in St. John, New Brunswick, four in Quebec City, Quebec. From these ports of entry it took a long train ride across the seemingly endless Canadian countryside to reach the western prairies. Two families went to Winkler, one to Altona, two to Alexander, eight to Rosthern, while one continued on to Crowfoot, Alberta. They were heartily welcomed at each place, and given food and shelter until more permanent arrangements could be made. The Johann Goerz family first arrived in Rosthern, but then moved to Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, where Johann was asked to teach in a Bible School. The Peter Dyck family soon left Rosthern for Pincher Creek, Alberta, where some of the family members lived for many years. The Aron Wall and Willms family stayed with relatives in Waldheim, Saskatchewan, for a number of months, then moved to Namaka, Alberta. Franz Willms soon left Alexander to further his education in Gretna, Manitoba.<sup>25</sup>

### Murder at Midnight<sup>26</sup>

Each family in Hierschau had its own struggle, its own particular set of circumstances to deal with, its own decision to make regarding emigration. Gertrude Willms, before she died in 1924, had discussed emigration with Peter Dyck, her neighbour who lived in the third *Wirtschaft* down the street. After she died, her children, despite strong opposition from relatives, continued working on the plans to leave. Eventually, in August 1926, these plans came to fruition.

The children of Gertrude Willms who planned to leave (from here on the extended family will simply be called the Willms family) were Aron and Maria Wall (nee Braun) with their two children Johann and Katharina, Elisabeth Braun\*, Gertrude, Johann,

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\*Johann Braun had been Gertrude Willms' first husband. Their children were Heinrich, Maria (Wall) and Elisabeth. Johann Willms was Gertrude's second husband. Their children were Gerhard, Gertrude, Johann, Katharina and Aganetha.



Katharina and Aganetha Willms. One brother, Heinrich Braun, had previously escaped to America via Yugoslavia; another brother, Gerhard Willms, was unable to accompany the family because he was of military age.

Peter and Katharina Dyck, of *Wirtschaft* 27, their ten children, as well as Peter's mother Margaretha and his sister Aganetha also planned to depart at the same time.

Since the Willms and the Dycks intended to leave together, they had a combined auction. Another family, the Peter Spensts, had also decided to emigrate, so they added their items to those offered for sale. Since the Willms yard was the largest, the auction was held there. The Willms *Wirtschaft* had already been sold, as had the stationary engine, so the sale involved only the household goods, furniture and farm machinery.

August 24, 1926, was a beautiful sunny day. The air must have been filled with excitement as a large crowd of Mennonites and neighbouring Ukrainians and Russians gathered for the auction. Susanna Peters, a relative from Landskrone, had even come to the Willms farm to make borscht; she then sold bowls of the delicious steaming soup to the hungry participants. Articles sold well. One beautiful doll, no longer needed by an owner grown up, fetched 18 rubles. Various items brought good prices, perhaps helped by the predominant attitude in Hierschau that conditions would eventually improve. In the crowd a few enquiries were made as to who was the boss of the operation, and what did he look like, but no one paid any attention.

In the evening, after the last customer had left the yard, the money was taken to the *Grosse Stube* of the Willms house, and the counting began. Aron Wall, Peter Dyck, as well as Gerhard Plett (son of the *Aeltester*) and Johann Neufeld worked hard, on into the night, to complete the task. With night falling, preparations were made to settle everyone down. Four or five Russians, far from home, were put up in the *Nebenhaus*. The Wall family, as well as Susanna Peters, were in the *Sommer Stube*. Others were distributed in various rooms as space could be found, since there were almost 20 people to be accommodated.

In the meantime, knowing that there would be a large amount of money in the house, also knowing that others far and wide would be aware of this, security measures were taken. A fair number of people were staying at the Willms place, partly for the security of numbers; Peter Dyck and his son Franz, for example, intended to remain for the night. Four young men were to watch the front door — Johann Willms, Franz Dyck, as well as the night



watchman Franz Siemens, and a Neudorf boy. They would let the people in the house know if anything was happening. Peter Dyck and Aron Wall would only lie down on a bench in the *Grosse Stube*.

Some of the Willms girls visited their cousins that evening, and stayed quite late, since it was likely their last visit. They walked home and went to bed at midnight. Just as they were falling asleep, Aron Wall came into the room and pushed a box containing the auction money under one of their beds. The counting had been completed, Gerhard Plett and Johann Neufeld headed for home and Aron Wall and Peter Dyck lay down in the *Grosse Stube*. Before going to sleep Peter Dyck, with child-like faith, thanked his heavenly Father for the blessings of the day, and requested protection for his family for the night.

The Neudorf boy had gone home, so the three remaining watchmen stayed outside the front door, sitting on the porch benches. Through the clear night air they heard the creaking of a wagon off in the distance in the direction of Waldheim. They were discussing what to do should it come closer to Hierschau when suddenly they were attacked. A group of men had sneaked around the front corner of the house to surprise them. Franz Siemens, the night watchman, got up and ran. He was shot in the middle of the yard. He survived, for the bullet just grazed his scalp. Johann Willms and Franz Dyck tried to wake up those inside the house by pounding on the front door, and also tried to get into the house, but all the doors had been bolted from the inside. The thieves clubbed them both with the butts of their guns, until they fell unconscious and were left for dead.

By this time Peter Dyck and Aron Wall were awake, and Aron asked Peter to follow him. Aron ran through the various rooms waking people. He came through the *Kleine Stube* and cried out, "Girls get up and save your lives! Run for your lives!" Hearing all the screaming, cursing, shooting and flying glass, Katharina wondered, in a dazed state, if she may have awakened in hell. But Elisabeth took her younger sisters Katharina and Aganetha by the hand and headed for the back door. As they reached it, they heard a shot, then a falling body. Obviously the back door was not the way to go. They headed back into the house, to the hallway which led to the barn. They tried to hide up in the attic, but Gerhard Willms, shotgun in hand, barred the way. He would not let them go up because of the danger to their lives, should the house be set on fire. "Try to get out through the barn," he said. They ran into the barn and hid among the horses. By that time there were bandits in the house and barn, probably coming through a broken window.

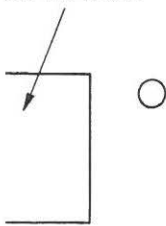
They were screaming at the girls, telling them to come out. There was only one escape — through the door leading to the *Scheune*, and the bandits were shooting at it. With the bandits coming ever closer and the horses increasingly restless, the three girls made a break for it. They somehow got through the door, then hid under the threshing machine in the *Scheune*. From there they squeezed through a gap in the boards of a side wall, then ran out to the back garden. They could still hear the shooting and screaming, so they ran behind the gardens to the home of the Peter Warkentins, old friends of the family. Peter Warkentin knelt down and prayed that somebody else might survive, for at the time the girls thought that they may have been the only ones.

Maria Wall and her two young children, Johann and Katharina, were rudely awakened by the noise, the children frightened and crying. Susanna Peters took Johann in her arms, Maria took Katharina. Maria tried to calm down the infant and headed for the barn. There she managed to quieten Katharina enough, so that the two of them remained undiscovered. Susanna Peters, with Johann in her arms, in the meantime headed for the back door, where she was attacked by bandits. Little Johann called out for "*Papa en de Somma Stow*" (Low German: Father in the summer room). Obviously understanding Low German, and wanting to find the man in charge, the bandits headed for the *Somma Stow*. In the meantime Susanna, Johann still in her arms, headed out the back door. When the bandits found, however, that there was no one in the *Somma Stow*, they caught up with Susanna in the front garden. They beat her about the head, pulled her by her long hair, and fired off a gun near her head, thereby deafening her. Falling unconscious, she dropped Johann, who had also received some of the blows. With bloody head and back, the two-year-old Johann crawled into the neighbouring hedge to hide, and kept calling out for help.

Aron Wall and Peter Dyck, hearing the first sounds of the bandit attack, headed from the *Grosse Stube* to the *Eck Stube*, from which Aron proceeded to the *Kleine Stube*. Peter Dyck had not followed him all the way, but tried to escape through the window of the *Eck Stube*. Obviously the whole house was surrounded by bandits, for as he was jumping through the window a shot rang out, and Peter was hit in the head. Probably dead instantaneously, his body fell out through the window, whereas fragments of his brain and skull splattered inside the house. This was almost surely the shot and the falling body the Willms girls had heard.

Gerhard Willms, in the meantime, still in the attic with his

BENHAUS, WHERE THE  
SSIANS SLEPT, THEN  
) IN THE STOVE



MONEY WAS COUNTED HERE,  
THEN ARON WALL AND  
PETER DYCK LAY  
DOWN ON  
COUCH

BANDITS CAME AROUND  
THE CORNER, SURPRISING  
THE THREE WATCHMEN

PETER DYCK TRIED TO JUMP  
OUT THE WINDOW. HE WAS  
SHOT IN THE HEAD, HIS  
BODY FELL OUTSIDE

FRANZ SIEMENS GOT UP  
AND RAN, BUT WAS SHOT  
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE YARD

MONEY HIDDEN UNDER A  
BED IN THE KLEINE STUBE

JOHANN WILLMS, FRANZ DYCK AND  
FRANZ SIEMENS SAT ON THE  
BENCHES ON THE PORCH AND  
TALKED. JOHANN WILLMS AND  
FRANZ DYCK, WHEN THEY WERE  
ATTACKED, WERE CLUBBED WITH  
GUN BUTTS AND LEFT FOR DEAD

SUSANNA PETERS,  
HOLDING JOHANN WALL,  
TRIED TO ESCAPE OUT  
THE BACK DOOR, BUT  
WAS CAUGHT AND  
BEATEN. JOHANN  
CRAWLED INTO THE  
HEDGE

ELISABETH WITH KATHARINA AND  
AGANETHA TRIED THE BACK DOOR, THEN  
ESCAPED THROUGH THE BARN AND  
SCHEUNE TO THE GARDEN, THEN TO THE  
PETER WARKENTINS.

THE JOHANN WILLMS HOUSE  
ON AUGUST 24, 1926

HH/DH

shotgun, hearing the screaming, shooting and cursing below, fired a shot through the front window. The bandits heard this shot, and possibly recognizing that it was not one of their own guns, became wary. They had also not counted on finding so many screaming occupants around every corner of the house. As suddenly as they had attacked, they now departed. Without having found the boss or the money, they hopped onto their wagon, possibly dragging one of their number along (a trail of blood was later discovered in the house; it was thought that perhaps one of the bandits was struck by one of their own stray bullets), and headed in the direction of Waldheim. By this time the whole village had been awakened, and from the amount of shooting that had occurred, it was assumed that there were few survivors. The rumour spread that the entire Willms family had been murdered.

When it became obvious that the bandits had left for good, each individual or small group, thinking that maybe they were the only survivors, started coming out of hiding. This included the Russians who had been sleeping in the *Nebenhaus*. At first suspected of being part of the bandit group, they had actually been as terrified as anyone else. Some of them had hidden inside the bake oven, pulling the grate shut behind them for protection. Johann Willms and Franz Dyck regained consciousness, although they were still bleeding from their head wounds. Young Johann Wall was rescued from the hedge. But the body of Peter Dyck remained still, and was covered where it lay.

The police were summoned, and soon arrived. They wanted everything left the way it was, including the body of Peter Dyck, until a bloodhound arrived from Melitopol. When the dog was finally brought later in the day, he followed the trail to Waldheim, then northward. Arriving at a house apparently occupied only by an elderly lady, the hound lost interest in the trail when she gave him a large piece of meat.

Together with the police, medical help came from Waldheim to administer first aid to the robbery victims. With the first light of day the more seriously bruised and bleeding were loaded onto three wagons and taken to Dr. Wiebe at Lichtfelde. Other patients were already waiting for the doctor, but when they saw the condition of the new arrivals, they allowed them to be attended to first. Bleeding was stopped, wounds were cleansed, and heads were bound up.

Katharina Dyck, wife of Peter, had heard the shots and screaming at the Willms *Wirtschaft*, and was told that Aron Wall had been shot. When she came to see what had happened and to offer con-



Peter and Katharina Dyck

dolences, she found to her horror that her own husband had been killed. After the bloodhound had arrived, and the police were finished with their investigation, Peter's body could finally be moved and prepared for burial. He himself had been the village mortician. Now someone else had to perform that duty.

Plans had previously been made for the Willms and the Dycks to leave for Canada a day or two after the auction. These plans were now changed. The Willms decided to wait so that they could be at the funeral of Peter Dyck, while the Dyck family had to update their documentation before they could depart.

The funeral of Peter Dyck was held on August 27, with widespread participation. Mrs. Dyck put on a brave front, although the younger children cried uncontrollably. Peter Warkentin of Hierschau made introductory remarks, Johann Toews and Peter Koehn presented the funeral messages, while Abraham Enns spoke at the graveside. The Hierschau choir sang beautifully. In all it was a very moving experience.

The Willms family was afraid that the bandits might strike again, so they stayed in hiding with relatives and friends, although they did go to Peter Dyck's funeral. On September 6 they gathered, and were taken to a more distant railroad station, Nelgowka, since they were afraid of being spotted at Stulnewo. Gerhard Willms, the one brother who was staying behind, drove them to the station.



Emigrants on the deck of the "Empress of Scotland" in September, 1926. Included in the group are the Willms and Spenst families from Hierschau.

Their train headed north to Moscow, where they stayed a few days, needing to obtain their passports. Luckily they had carried extra cash with them, for the price per passport had risen from the anticipated 50, up to 250 rubles. After repeated explanations as to why Johann Willms and Johann Wall had the large head bandages, and finally with passports in their pockets, they proceeded by train to Riga. There they boarded a ship which crossed the Baltic Sea, went through the Kiel Canal and on to England. Here Elisabeth Braun was thought to have trachoma and was detained, eventually rejoining the family in Canada in May, 1927. The rest of the family continued across the ocean on the "Empress of Scotland," landing in Quebec. They arrived in Rosthern, Saskatchewan on October 6, 1926, one month after they had left Hierschau. Later they heard that soon after they had boarded the train in Nelgowka a group of men had come looking for them.

The Peter Dyck family, minus Peter Dyck, had their documents changed and followed one week later. They arrived in Rosthern on October 12, 1926, with son Franz being delayed several months.

In 1970, about forty-four years after the murder of Peter Dyck, an anonymous request came from Russia through a third party, requesting forgiveness of the Dyck family. By then the wife, Katharina, had died, but the Dyck children gladly accepted the apology of a man whose conscience was bothering him for having

participated in the attempted robbery which resulted in the tragic death of their father.

## Conclusions

And so it was that many people from Hierschau, who a few years before would never have dreamed of leaving their home village, much less emigrating from Russia, prepared to enter the varied patterns of the Canadian mosaic. Despite initial reluctance to accept emigration as an option, eventually about one-quarter of the inhabitants of Hierschau moved from the wide steppes of the Southern Ukraine to the equally wide open prairies of Western Canada.





## XVI ALL THINGS COMMON

### Conditions in the Late 1920s

In 1928 about three percent of the land in the Soviet Union was tilled by collective, cooperative or communal farms. The newly instituted Five Year Plan included proposals to increase this to 20% by 1933. The process of collectivization was to be voluntary, but the preferential supply of farm machinery, such as tractors and combines, to the collectives, was to induce the farmers to join them.

This may have been the official party line, but the practical application of the principle by local officials often included many other wrinkles, largely designed to destroy the more aggressive and successful farmers. Capital was needed for the country's industrial development, and it was extracted in any way possible.<sup>1</sup> A correspondent reported on conditions in the Molotschna in 1928:

We are among those who receive frequent visits. The government goes out of its way to help us. Our grain is put up into piles so that the insects will not infest it. It would be too bad if the horses ate such grain, for they would get stomach cramps. If such grain were used as seed, weeds would grow instead of wheat. In 1928 we ourselves added an additional tax, since in 1927 we had paid so little (?). I have paid an additional 105 rubles, and in addition I purchased 200 rubles worth of bonds, with which I will eventually earn much money (?). We had to pay 200 rubles to buy the stock in the cooperative store. The good thing was, that this was all voluntary. A number are again losing land, some have been relieved of 16 dessiatines, others eight and still others six . . . Grain is bought from the farmer at a fixed price of 72 kopecks per pud. The grain is taken to Halbstadt, there it is all put into one pile. In this way one obtains first class seed grain, which then is much better, and is worth 1 ruble 17 kopecks. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Another correspondent carefully explained exactly what the various options for farmers were after the 15th Communist Party Congress embarked on its Five Year Plan. There were *Machine and Tractor Cooperatives*, in which not less than 15 private farmers joined to purchase power equipment to be used collectively. Then there were *Associations for Collective Working of the Land* in which at least ten farmers combined their land, worked it in com-

mon, and shared the crops. In addition there were *Collective Work Groups* where at least ten workers combined resources and later equally divided the income among the participants. The final option, and the desired end result of the other three, was the *Commune*, in which each participant joined with his "body, soul and fortune . . . work is done in common. Each person works as much as he can, and receives as much as he needs."<sup>3</sup> This description detailed the attempt to form *kolkhozy* (Russian: collective or communal farms). Presumably the authorities were at the same time also trying to establish a number of *sovkhozy*, state farms with wage-earning peasants as workers.

Religious freedom was slowly, but surely, eroded. Schools were being used, no longer to teach religion, but to propagate Communist philosophy. Teachers were supposed to lay the foundation for the formation of Communist Pioneer groups among their students.<sup>4</sup> One teacher at the agricultural school in Gnadenfeld, where previously Kornelius Martens had been released because of his faith, now almost forced the students to sign up for the party.<sup>5</sup> There was a commonly recognized campaign against pastors, priests and ministers, this being "the order of the day."<sup>6</sup> Government policy opposed religion and appeared to be dedicated to the cause of closing down the churches.

### Reorganization

Likely in late 1928 there was a reorganization of the regional government districts in the Molotschna area. The Molotschansk Region, part of the Melitopol Area, came to include the Molotschna, but also neighbouring Prischib, as well as a number of other areas. In total, there were 154 villages, of which 105 were German, 49 Russian or Ukrainian. The 48,872 inhabitants were under the jurisdiction of 32 village councils. Seventy-two percent of the people were German, 17.8% Ukrainian and 8.7% Russian. There were at the time 9,491 individual farms in the Molotschansk Region, with relatively few communal or collective operations (see Table XXVI).<sup>7</sup>

### Collectivization

Initial government policy appeared to allow collectivization to be voluntary, albeit with powerful and capriciously applied economic incentives. The Communist Party seemed to think that rapid and large scale action was impractical, since rural party administrators were too few, and farm machinery was scarce.

Early in November 1929, however, Joseph Stalin announced

TABLE XXVI  
FARMS AND AGRICULTURAL OPERATIONS  
IN THE MOLOTSCHANSK REGION IN 1928

Total Amount of Land (in dessiatines)	163,761
Individual Farms (number of farms)	9,491
Communal Farms	3
Agricultural Cooperatives	7
Association of Collective Working of the Land	74
Tractor Cooperatives	24
Cattle Raising Cooperatives	29
Creamery Cooperatives	4
Market Garden Cooperatives	3

that there was to be immediate and massive collectivization on a scale hitherto unheard of. In December he added an additional feature, that the *kulak* class (the wealthier individual farmers, by that time actually just the ordinary farmers) was to be eliminated. In three months, between December 1929, and March 1930, 58% of the peasant households were collectivized. J.N. Westwood, in describing this time, comments: "What happened in these three months . . . is not clear, but appears to have been ghastly."<sup>8</sup> Party officials were asked to fan class warfare, with poorer peasants robbing the wealthier. Some suspect *kulaks* were sent to concentration camps and their families deported, while others were simply turned out of their homes. They were allowed to settle on poor land, but when they were unable to deliver impossible grain delivery quotas, they were also deported. Anyone who resisted collectivization was automatically a *kulak* and received the same treatment. Similar actions were taken against religious leaders, the subsidiary purpose of crippling the church being served when most of the ministers were banished to far-off concentration camps. An additional feature, a paradox in itself, was the loss of the right to vote for those who were dispossessed, deported or banned. For practical purposes this meant that they had lost all their property, but were also left with no possible means of support.

The three month assault on the individual farm brought on such widespread protest throughout the Soviet Union, that even Stalin's iron will bent a little (no compassion involved, it was strictly fear). For a time there was a slight reversal of the process, but a new drive, apparently less brutal, but no less effective, eventual-

ly assured that 98% of the agricultural land in the country became state or collective farms by 1941.<sup>9</sup>

The conditions described for the peasants of the Soviet Union at large certainly applied to the Molotschna Colony, and specifically to Hierschau.

The campaign strategy is graphically described by a correspondent who wished the truth to be known, but asked that his name not be published for fear of the G.P.S. (Soviet Secret Police):

We had worked hard all summer and had enough bread and enough money to meet our obligations. When they noticed this they took everything away, for in one year we had to pay 1,500 rubles in cash and grain. Our cattle herds have shrunk away, the granaries are empty and we have only rye bread: yet we are called *kulaks* . . . In February they demanded another 400 rubles, and when we tried to pay by selling cattle and furniture they did not allow us to do that. When we could not pay, everything except our clothing and bedding was listed (as government property, and therefore could not be sold), and yet we were supposed to pay . . . In this way 21 farms have been listed in Hierschau. But that was not the worst of it. Not long ago an order was given that people were to be moved out of our villages, and in 24 hours they were to be at the station in Lichtenau. That caused a hue and cry. Neither age nor sex were considered; small children, pregnant women, old decrepit people, all had to go, with the military standing by with their weapons. They were treated like cattle. People sang to the departing ones, were commanded to stop, but sang on. Some of the displaced people, for example Johann Rahn of Waldheim, were allowed to take almost nothing, others could take up to 30 pud along. At Lichtenau almost everything was taken from them, and all were driven into freight cars, 40 to 50 persons per car. The doors were closed and on the trip were opened only five minutes every other day for fresh air . . . There were more than 200 people on the train . . . On the way the poor people received only one loaf of bread and one pail of borscht per car. So it went to Moscow, and from there to Siberia . . . Now they are in barracks in Tomsk, hungry, freezing and dying. When the Ob is ice free they are to travel 500 verst further, to the Tajga, to work in their undernourished state and die.<sup>10</sup>

The Janzen family of Hierschau was among those banished to Siberia at this time.

Ten days after the departure from Lichtenau another 200 families were expelled from their homes in the Molotschna, and driven out onto the cold steppes in the region south of Alexanderkrone. Four of these families were from Hierschau. They were allowed to take virtually nothing with them, certainly not more than an old cow or horse, and there, on the bald dry plain, without money or building materials, they were supposed to settle down. No one else was allowed to bring them building materials.<sup>11</sup> It is not known how many people survived these difficult conditions.

More massive resettlement of Hierschau residents may have been delayed a year or two, but eventually at least 20 families, likely more, had to go. This represented about one-third of the total population, but of course a much higher percentage of the land owners.

On February 17, 1931, having been forced to pay increasingly high taxes, *Aeltester* Gerhard Plett was expelled from his house and yard. Because of his crippled condition he was allowed to keep only two items, his bed and his chair. As he was leaving the house, his pastoral calling still evident, he shook the hands and wished well the men who were moving him out. He stayed for a time with the Heinrich Sawatzkys in Landskrone, but when they were also expelled from their home in the summer of 1931, Gerhard Plett was moved to the home of Kornelius Toews, still in Landskrone. Because of continuing difficulties with the local officials, his son-in-law, David Hildebrandt, secretly brought him back to Hierschau one night. But secrets are hard to keep, so two months later, in June of 1932, he was again loaded onto a wagon and transported to the home of Jakob Voth in Friedensdorf. Here he died peacefully about ten months later.<sup>12</sup>

Gerhard, son of the *Aeltester*, his wife, and five children were also forced out of their home in 1931, but were allowed to stay in the village. The David Hildebrandt family, with four children, were expelled from their *Wirtschaft* at the same time. These two families, as well as Maria Plett, Anna Plett and Gerhard Schellenberg (seven adults and nine children) moved into the cowherd's cottage. They lived on what they could earn working for the collective farm, but things were very difficult. The Plett *Wirtschaft* No. 7 was subsequently used to store grain, flour and other such commodities. Other people moved into *Wirtschaft* No. 1, the home of the Hildebrandts. The Gerhard Plett family lived in the

cowherd's cottage until 1933. When it was rumoured that they were about to be "taken", the whole family went to the train station, Stulnewo, at night, and despite a close brush with the police, managed to catch a train in the morning to leave the region.<sup>13</sup>

A third Gerhard Plett (the authorities seem to have had a grudge against that name), Gerhard Kornelius Plett, son of Kornelius Plett, was also expelled from his home in 1931 together with his family. His wife Elisabeth had to cope alone with their eight children, since Gerhard, a minister of the Landskrone church, was taken off to jail in Melitopol.<sup>14</sup>

In the autumn of 1931 the authorities wanted the Gerhard Wiebes of *Wirtschaft* No. 29 to pay a large sum of money, which they were unable to do. Their property, including the farm, was auctioned off, the money going to the government. In November, with a day or two warning, they were told to leave the house. They could choose where to go. At 5 P.M. one evening men came from the local government office in Waldheim to move them. Despite a raging snowstorm the Wiebes and their eight children were loaded onto two wagons, one covered, one open. They were taken to Kleefeld, home of their married daughter, Elisabeth Willms, a two or three hour journey. The Wiebes stayed in Kleefeld about one month, but things were rather difficult, so they moved on. The situation was aggravated by the fact that Gerhard Wiebe had also lost his right to vote, and therefore could not support the family. The authorities considered him to be virtually non-existent, therefore neither he nor his family needed food or shelter.<sup>15</sup>

And so it went. Family after family was forced from their homes, many in the dead of winter, often during terrible storms. Most of the farms then became part of the collective, the houses being occupied by the landless or by other Germans, Ukrainians or Russians who were moved into the village. Table XXVII lists those farmers who are known to have been evicted during this time, some of which actually stayed in Hierschau, but under altered and much more difficult circumstances.<sup>16</sup>

## Hierschau in the 1930s

Even the most cataclysmic events eventually run their course, and so after the forced departures of 1930 and 1931, village life in Hierschau seems to have settled down.

Peter Mierau, at the time living in Waldheim, together with his younger brother Jakob, was the Hierschau cowherd in the summer of 1930. He found it a pleasure to walk down the straight and level Hierschau main street. All the yards were fenced in, some with or-

TABLE XXVII  
HIERSCHAU FAMILIES FORCED FROM THEIR HOMES  
1930-1931

David Hildebrandt (*Wirtschaft* No. 1)  
Peter Neufeld (5)  
Gerhard Plett (7)  
Heinrich Bergen (10)  
Jakob Janzen (11)  
Gerhard Plett (*Aeltester*) (12)  
Kornelius Siemens (13)  
Johann Stobbe (14)  
Heinrich Kaethler (Minister) (15)  
Johann Fast (17)  
Gerhard Bergen (20)  
Kornelius Peters (21)  
Jakob Thiessen (23)  
Kornelius Goertzen (24)  
Franz Neufeld (25)  
Jakob Duerksen (26)  
Peter Wolf (28)  
Gerhard Wiebe (29)  
Johann Becker (30)  
Gerhard Kornelius Plett (Minister)

namental brick fences. In front of the houses were fruit trees and flower pots. There were, however, even at that time, signs of neglect and lack of interest in the farming operations. Buildings and farm implements were just not kept up.<sup>17</sup> This was in the middle of the period of collectivization and dekulakization, so it is not difficult to understand why.

Another lad from Waldheim, Victor Koehn, described Hierschau as remaining pretty well intact in the 1930s, as far as buildings were concerned, although brick fences and driveways were slowly used up for other things. Some yards eventually had no fences at all, but a number of picket fences remained, and patches of the odd ornamental brick survived.<sup>18</sup> In the time of anarchy and during the subsequent Communist rule, wood was at a premium as fuel. Nothing remained of the Hierschau forest, and even the stately row of trees connecting Hierschau and Waldheim had been chopped down. Hierschau was, however, still very green,



the yards being so full of fruit trees that the houses could hardly be seen. Young Victor Koehn and his grandmother occasionally went to Hierschau to buy fruit, but it was much more fun for the youngsters to raid the lush orchards by themselves.

Agriculture had taken a definite step backwards. The number of animals per farm was considerably less than it had been prior to World War I. The techniques of threshing reverted back to the simple mechanical methods. Originally a fair number of Hierschau farmers had used stationary naphtha engines to power modern threshing machines. Now they found the old *Uetfoasteen* (Low German: threshing stone) behind the barn and started to use it again. Grain was spread out on the yard in a circular fashion, and horses pulled the metre long cogwheel stone around and around, shaking and grinding the grain out of the ears. Some threshing was also done using the flail, where the kernels were beat out of the grain with a stick.

The White Earth Pits were still in operation during the 1930s, although Hierschau benefited less directly from their presence than previously. They were likely owned by the regional collective farm with the office therefore situated in Waldheim. A total of about 15 people were employed there, with perhaps eight horses to help pull and carry loads. The earth and clay were still there, but bureaucracy slowed down the process of obtaining it, to the extent that people simply went there with their own shovels and bags, loaded up their wagons and drove off.<sup>19</sup> Heinrich Gaede, his wife and four children lived in Liebenau, where he looked after horses. He was accused of a misdemeanour, so he had to leave Liebenau for a time. He and his family came to Hierschau in 1931, where he continued to work with horses, this time at the White Earth Pits. Heinrich often had to pull along with the horses, because they were in such a weakened condition.<sup>20</sup>

The village school was in operation in the 1930s, with two rooms, two teachers, about 40 students, but only four grades. The older children who continued their education beyond that level walked to Waldheim. There was usually rivalry in the Waldheim school between the two village groups.

One can get a general idea of the pervasive atmosphere in the Hierschau school, with the very strict government supervision, by noting what happened to Katharina Gaede on one occasion. She missed school on December 26, 1932. Her younger brother Peter was born that day, and she had to help her mother. Assuming that Katharina had been kept out of school because it was a religious holiday, the authorities wanted to confiscate any remaining family



furniture as punishment. Only the intervention of her father's boss prevented this from actually happening.<sup>21</sup>

Authorities were probably trying to widen the economic base of Hierschau by introducing agricultural business to the village. A creamery was established, being built on the north side of the street, Waldheim end, probably just beyond the last *Kleinwirt* buildings. The state-owned business was called *Maslozavod* (Russian: Creamery). All the surrounding country had to bring milk to the creamery, where butter and other milk products were prepared, largely for export. In all likelihood Hierschau people worked there, but others were also brought in. The Johann Willms' former home, near that end of the village, was arranged into a number of separate quarters for creamery workers. Other people, such as machinist Kornelius Koehn, walked in from Waldheim. Nicholas Zagorsky, a Leningrad trained technical engineer, was sent to Hierschau in 1937 to work at the creamery, then a year later was transferred out again. The creamery continued to operate, likely bringing much needed money into the region, until the area was overrun by the German army in 1941.<sup>22</sup>

## The Purge

But the 1930s could not end with relative tranquility, however strained. The Stalin purges of the Communist Party and of the Armed Forces of 1936 to 1938 also extended to the quiet countryside of Hierschau.

Gerhard Wiebe, son of Gerhard Wiebe of *Wirtschaft* No. 29, had a wife and two children when he was taken in 1937.<sup>23</sup> Jakob Duerksen, son of the former *Oberschulze* Jakob Duerksen, also married with at least three children, was arrested in 1937 as well, and sent to a concentration camp in northern Russia.<sup>24</sup> Abraham Plett, son of Bernard Plett was taken in 1938 or 1939 and probably died in a concentration camp.<sup>25</sup>

Gerhard Kornelius Plett, a minister of the Landskrone church, but living in Hierschau, was originally jailed in 1931 at the same time that his family was displaced from their home. After spending five hard years in jail, enduring torture such as having needles driven under his nails, he was eventually released and allowed to return to his family. But the joy was short-lived. A year later on October 20, 1937, the police were again at the door. Gerhard Plett was taken from his home and family and was never heard from again.<sup>26</sup>

In total at least 1500 men from the Molotschna were *verschleppt* (literally: dragged away, commonly used to mean being

jailed, then sent to concentration or labour camps). Eleven victims of the Purge were from Hierschau.<sup>27</sup>

## BOOK 4. THE FINAL DIASPORA

With the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, the reshaping of Eastern Europe began. Having divided up Poland with the Soviet Union, Hitler then secured his western flank by the occupation of Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France. Again looking eastward, Hitler's armies crashed into the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, soon overrunning much of the Ukraine, including the Molotschna. With typical German thoroughness, the army documented as it went. *Dorfkarten*, recording statistics for villages inhabited by German populations, also included Hierschau. By that time only 37% of the people living in Hierschau were Mennonites.

But the tides of war were changing. After the defeat at Stalingrad, the German forces were gradually, yet inexorably pushed back. Most of the Mennonite population of the Molotschna joined the retreating armies on the Great Trek. Starting in Hierschau on September 12, 1943, the villagers, by train, wagon or on foot, eventually reached Lower Saxony. Here, probably under considerable duress, most families were persuaded by the Soviets to return to their home village. Most never got there. Instead, they were scattered far and wide throughout the Soviet Union — mostly in the far north and Siberia.

Hierschau still exists today as a suburb of Waldheim. However, Hierschau as the Mennonites knew it, as an example of Russian Mennonite life, has disappeared. It now exists only in the hearts and minds of its former citizens, wherever they are scattered throughout the world.

Was Hierschau a good example of Russian Mennonite life? That depends on the definition of "Mennonite." The early Anabaptists, exemplified and led by Menno Simons, practised a life of radical discipleship, held to baptism on faith, and were irrespressible evangelists. The Russian Mennonites, by the mid-nineteenth century, saw their faith as something to be guarded jealously, to be nurtured in closed, rigidly regulated communities, to be demonstrated to others by carefully controlled behavior and the excellence of their *Wirtschaften*. Originally planned as a model, Hierschau undoubtedly was a showpiece of this modified style of Mennonitism. Hierschau was a good example of Russian Mennonite life, Johann Cornies style.



## XVII BLITZKRIEG

World War II began when Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. At the outbreak of World War I Russia had assumed the role of champion of the Slavic people. This time, instead of helping in the time of distress, Soviet Russia showed her imperialistic tendency by participating in the destruction of her neighbour. On September 17, Soviet troops crossed the eastern Polish borders, and by October 5, organized resistance to this double invasion collapsed. Polish territory was divided up between the two superpowers according to the prearranged provisions of the secret Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.<sup>1</sup> Both Germany and the Soviet Union proceeded to integrate the new areas of conquest into their empires, each in its own inimical way.<sup>2</sup>

Germany then carefully secured its western borders. The invasion and occupation of Denmark and Norway occurred in April of 1940. The Dutch and Belgian borders were stormed on May 10, leading to the eventual capitulation of France on June 25, 1940.<sup>3</sup> Hitler chose not to invade Britain, but rather to batter the stubborn population into submission from the air. Although Hermann Goering's *Luftwaffe* failed to conquer the island people, Britain was nonetheless sufficiently isolated so as not to pose an imminent threat.

### The Invasion

At 4 A.M. on June 22, 1941, the German Army smashed across the border into Soviet Russia. One hundred and forty divisions, of these 17 Panzer and 13 Mechanized, 3,300 tanks and 2,770 aircraft threw themselves into action.<sup>4</sup> Operation Barbarossa, the plan to conquer European Russia, was off to a good start.

There were three main initial thrusts. The Northern Army under von Leeb headed through the Baltic States towards Leningrad. Army Group Centre, of von Bock, was on the road to Moscow. The Southern Army Group commanded by von Rundsted was slated to overrun the Ukraine with its heavy industry and food producing potential, then via the Don Basin to reach the Caucasian oilfields further south and east. Rumania, Italy and Slovakia at the same time also declared war on the Soviet Union, some of their troops actively participating in the campaign.

Peter Sudermann, born in Waldheim soon after his parents moved there from Hierschau, was a student in Lvov (formerly Lemberg) at the time of the invasion. This city was in Soviet-occupied Poland near the border with German territory, and was

the site of intense activity in May and June of 1941. Peter and other university students were taken out to dig tank traps every night, while masses of troops went through the city heading for the border.<sup>5</sup> Soviet claims of complete surprise at the attack of June 22 must therefore be open to considerable doubt. The Russian forces were simply overwhelmed at the border by the fury of the assault, despite their preparations.

By July 9 the success of the German invasion was so dramatic in all sectors that General Halder, Chief of the German Army General Staff, considered that the war was as good as won. In August, German and Rumanian forces pushed deep into the Ukraine, by the end of the month occupying all areas west of the Dniepr River. Here they halted for some time to regroup before pushing further eastward. They had overrun the Chortitza Colony prior to this pause, but had not quite reached the Molotschna.

It was Soviet policy to evacuate as much industry as possible, together with the required labour force, away from areas about to be occupied by the enemy. Between July and November of 1941 a total of 1,523 industrial enterprises were moved east — to the Volga area, to the Urals, to Siberia as well as Kazakhstan and Central Asia.<sup>6</sup> Wherever enough transport was available, as much of the population as could be crammed onto trains was also shipped east. This applied particularly to minority groups which had been persecuted under Soviet rule, the fear being that they would welcome the advancing German armies. The Mennonites were, although small and relatively insignificant, one of these minorities.

Shortly before the German forces arrived, likely about September 30 in most Molotschna villages, all men between the ages of 16 and 65 were asked to report to the administrative centres. They were taken away and sent to the far north or Siberia, presumably to work in the newly established industrial areas. Many were never seen again. At least 1,547 men were carried off from 23 of the Molotschna villages (many were also taken from the other 36 villages, but the numbers were not recorded). Thirty-seven of this group were from Hierschau.<sup>7</sup>

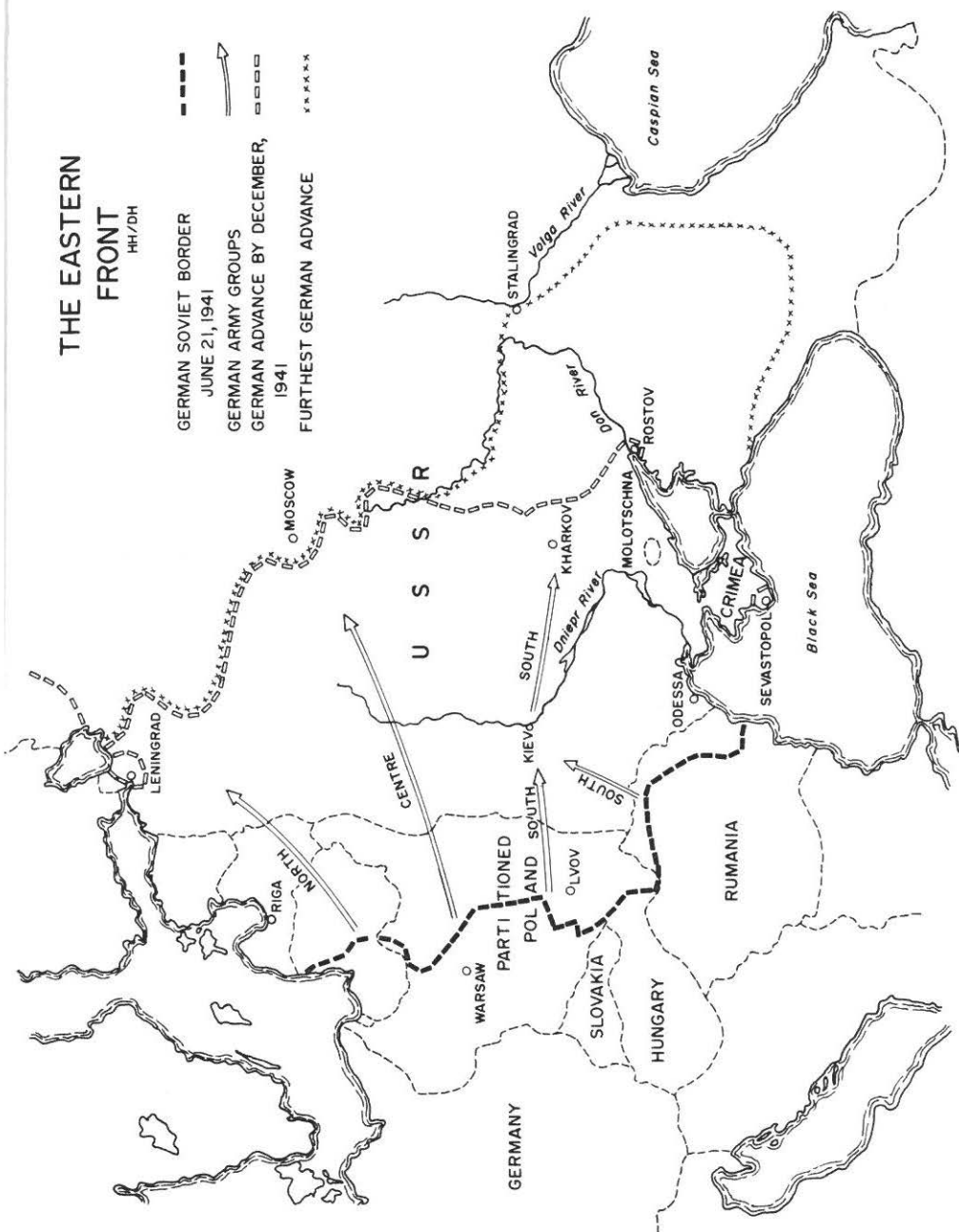
Jakob, Kornelius and Dietrich Wiebe, sons of Gerhard Wiebe of *Wirtschaft* No. 29, were taken.<sup>8</sup> Four sons of Gerhard K. Plett, who himself had earlier been imprisoned in 1937, were among those sent east.<sup>9</sup> Aron Neufeld, husband of Anna Plett, was also taken and never heard from again.<sup>10</sup>

As the invading forces came ever nearer, the Soviets tried to evacuate the whole Mennonite population from the Molotschna. With the German pause for regrouping on the western banks of the

# THE EASTERN FRONT

HH/DH

- GERMAN SOVIET BORDER
- JUNE 21, 1941
- GERMAN ARMY GROUPS
- GERMAN ADVANCE BY DECEMBER, 1941
- FURTHEST GERMAN ADVANCE



Dniepr, the Soviets managed to spirit away many of the documents and some of the factory machinery, but the people remained. On October 1 all villages were ordered to evacuate. The people were to be ready on the street in two hours. The southern and western villages such as Altonau, Muensterberg, Blumstein, Lichtenau, Ohrloff, Tiege, Blumenort, Rosenort, Kleefeld and Alexanderkrone, as well as others along the southern line of settlements were taken to the Feodorowka and Lichtenau stations. Northern and central villages including Halbstadt, Petershagen, Ladekopp, Gnadental, Margenau, Alexanderwohl, Rueckenau and Tiegerweide went to Station Halbstadt and Gross Tokmak. Waldheim, Hierschau, Landskrone, Klippenfeld, Hamberg, Gnadenfeld, Konteniusfeld and other western villages were sent to Stulnewo.<sup>11</sup> There they waited. Rumours spread quickly, with Siberia the most feared destination.

As the rumble of cannons drew ever closer, the people at the Feodorowka and Lichtenau stations were put onto trains, and at least 5,440 were evacuated. This included most of the Mennonites from the western and southern villages of the Molotschna (see Table XXVIII).<sup>12</sup> The 10,000 people camped around the Halbstadt-Gross Tokmak area as well as the 7,000 at the Stulnewo Station just waited. Many trains passed through, but the order to board them never came.

One day a Russian aircraft flew over the Stulnewo encampment, circled, then left. This happened several days. On October 5 German aircraft appeared to challenge the Russian, and a dogfight followed, watched in fascination by the thousands below. The Russian was shot down and crashed near the camp. Some of the refugees ran to the site of the crash and spoke to the pilot. He had been ordered to strafe the camp but had not had the heart to do it. In a few minutes he died.<sup>13</sup>

As it became apparent that the Russians would not be able to move all machinery and supplies from the area, they started destroying as much as they could. The people at Stulnewo could hear the explosions in the distance as various major buildings and factories, such as the Neufeld mill, were blown up in Waldheim. The retreating Russians also tried to burn down some of the granaries near Stulnewo, the blazing fires easily visible through the dark night.

The morning of October 6 was very still, not even the trees moved. No Soviet officials remained to supervise the refugees at the two large encampments. As the day progressed the various villagers simply decided to go back home. On foot the Hierschau



people trekked back to their own homes and resumed normal activities. A group of refugees from Tschongraw, Crimea, joined them, for the time being bedding down in the creamery building.

Later that day the region was occupied by Rumanian and German troops. There had been no major battles in the Molotschna area, so there was little destruction as a result of the conflict. Some dead soldiers were later found in the fields, mostly Rumanians and Russians.<sup>14</sup> After the troops moved through, the region was administered by SS personnel under the direction of Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi philosopher.<sup>15</sup>

## The Occupation

By and large the Germans living in the conquered territories welcomed the army of their old fatherland, which had liberated them from the oppressive Soviet regime. Law and order, German style, were now instituted. Many aspects of life became much easier. German books, medical supplies, food and clothing were brought in, although there is no mention of restoration of religious services. Special action teams eliminated undesirable elements of society, in some instances executing people who had previously reported their own villagers to the Russian secret police.<sup>16</sup> Jews also received special attention. There were several in the Hierschau-Waldheim area. They were probably also eliminated; their bodies were rumoured to have been dumped into the White Earth Pits near Hierschau.<sup>17</sup>

With typical German thoroughness, considerable documentation was carried out in the zone of occupation, particularly relating to the ethnic German population. This included the Mennonites. Documents were collected and statistics gathered in each village, using local people such as teachers to help in the project. Two-page *Dorfkarten* (village cards) were prepared in late 1941 and early 1942 for each German village in the Ukraine. These cards were later carried back to Germany with the retreating army, then for some reason taken to the Library of Congress in Washington by the occupying American forces. Here they were eventually discovered in 1973. *Dorfkarten* of 38 Molotschna villages are available for study.<sup>18</sup> Hierschau is one of these villages (see Table XXVIII).

## *Dorfkarte* Information

Hierschau statistics were gathered on January 29, 1942. At that time it was a village of 460 people, of which only 38% were of German origin. Almost all of this group was Mennonite, one family being Catholic. This low percentage of Mennonites (37%) indicates

TABLE XXVIII  
MOLOTSCHNA VILLAGES  
DORFKARTEN AND OTHER INFORMATION

Village	Total Population	Percent German	Total German	People Taken	
				Prewar (Men)	After June 1941
Halbstadt	7,348	27	1984	122	367
Petershagen	710	30	213	5	62
Ladekopp	528	33	176	35	34
Gross Tokmak*	18,100	4	724	74	120
Fuerstenau	—	—	—	—	—
Schoensee	542	91	493	58	46
Liebenau	336	94	316	30	36
Wernersdorf	—	—	—	—	—
Hamberg	349	65	227	46	40
Klippenfeld	228	57	130	16	7
Muntau	—	—	—	—	—
Tiegenhagen	—	—	487	29	51
Schoenau	456	79	360	20	50
Fischau	471	65	306	—	—
Lindenau	562	76	427	21	37
Lichtenau	224	18	41	23	257
Blumstein	110	18	20	33	484
Muensterberg	198	8	16	12	371
Altonau	108	19	20	35	420
Ohrloff	279	4	12	17	332
Tiege	—	—	136	47	484
Blumenort	192	5	10	22	235
Rosenort	99	25	25	43	434
Tiegerweide	—	—	—	—	—
Rueckenau	—	—	—	—	—
Kleefeld	50	50	25	110	556
Alexanderkrone	167	11	19	15	321
Lichtfelde	144	17	25	60	332
Neukirch	104	21	22	68	355
Friedensruh	—	—	—	—	All German
Prangenu	68	50	34	14	306
Steinfeld	94	19	18	31	195
Steinbach	—	—	—	—	—

Elisabethtal	—	—	—	—	All German
Alexandertal	73	30	22	51	358
Schardau	—	—	—	—	All German
Pordenau	—	—	—	—	50% of German
Mariental	—	—	—	—	50% of German
Fuerstenwerder	—	—	—	—	—
Alexanderwohl	—	—	—	—	—
Gnadenheim	448	99	444	26	83
Friedensdorf	351	98	344	44	63
Landskrone	501	77	386	131	64
Hierschau	460	38	175	11	37
Waldheim	1027	49	503	42	11
Margenau	346	84	291	30	62
Gnadental	367	88	323	33	38
Nikolaidorf	—	—	—	—	—
Mariawohl	234	85	199	28	36
Paulsheim	253	85	215	32	68
Gnadenfeld	—	—	—	65	120
Konteniusfeld	514	94	483	60	83
Sparrau	408	84	343	Total of	57
Rudnerweide	—	—	—	—	50% of German
Grosswiede	—	—	—	—	All German
Franztal	—	—	—	—	50% of German
Pastwa	—	—	—	—	All German

\*Gross Tokmak was not actually a Mennonite village, but was near by and had a substantial Mennonite population

Sources: Where data is complete in all categories it is taken from *Dorfkarten*

Tiegenhagen, Fischau and Tiege information, although incomplete, is also from *Dorfkarten*.

Gnadenfeld data, as well as those villages where the proportion of German population deported is listed, comes from H. Goerz, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten*, p. 207.

that a fair number of Ukrainians and Russians had moved into the village in the 1930s. Some came to replace Mennonites who had been displaced from their farms, others to work in the creamery. Waldheim also had a low percentage of Mennonite population (about 37%), Landskrone somewhat higher (72%), while other villages such as Gnadenheim and Friedensdorf were still almost exclusively Mennonite (see Table XXIX).

Of the 175 German people in Hierschau, only 25 were men, with 81 women and 69 children. There were seven complete and 40 separated families. The small number of men and large number of separated families of course reflects the loss of the 48 men who had previously been taken by the Soviet authorities. There had been eight mixed marriages, four involving German men, and four women. Two German people were in the Red Army, three Ukrainians from Hierschau had joined the Communist Party.

Ninety-seven percent of the German population of Hierschau were farmers, with only two tradesmen and four civil servants in the village. Since there was a two-room school in Hierschau, the teachers must have been non-Mennonite. The creamery and the White Earth Pit employed only Ukrainians and Russians in their operations, with no Mennonite labourers listed for Hierschau. In Landskrone the Mennonites took a more active role in both labour (19%) and the civil service (11%). In Waldheim, with its heavy industry, 68% were labourers (see Table XXX).

Notation was made of the last recorded incidence of various diseases. Tuberculosis, trachoma and dysentery were obviously still problems, with relatively recent outbreaks in the area. The last epidemics of scarlet fever and diphtheria were in 1937. Hierschau had no cases of malaria after 1934, or typhus after 1933 (see Table XXXI).

*Schulze* of Hierschau in January of 1942 was Kornelius Boschmann, the *Dorfkarte* listing him as *Vertrauensmann* (responsible person). His assistant was Gerhard Willms, the one son of Gertrude Willms who had stayed behind when the family emigrated in 1926. The mention of these positions does confirm that Hierschau was administratively a separate village at the time. Land area of all the villages in the region seems to have shrunk. Hierschau had 2,280 hectares during Czarist times, by 1942 reduced to 1,331 hectares (see Table XXXII)

## Village Life

While most of the people who were left after the Soviets

TABLE XXIX  
DORFKARTEN GENERAL INFORMATION

Line of villages from Gnadenheim to Waldheim  
(which includes Hierschau)

Name of Village	Total Population	Percentage German	Total German	Men	Women	Children	Men Taken		Families		Make up of German
							Pre war	1941	Full	Separ.	
Gnadenheim	448	99	444	45	187	212	26	83	25	82	80% Men. 20% Luth.
Friedensdorf	351	98	344	36	136	172	44	63	13	72	Mennonite
Landskrone	501	77	386	52	175	159	131	64	22	83	93% Men. 7% Luth.
Hierschau	460	38	175	25	81	69	11	37	7	40	98% Men. 2% Cath.
Waldheim	1027	49	503	36	256	211	42	11	26	126	75% Men. 25% Luth.

TABLE XXX  
OCCUPATIONS OF THE GERMAN PEOPLE  
(in percentages)

Occupation	Gnadenheim	Friedensdorf	Landskrone	Hierschau	Waldheim
Farmer	83	98	64	97	30
Tradesman	7	0	6	1	0
Academic	0	0	0	0	0
Labourer	0	0	19	0	68
Official (Civil Servant)	10	2	11	2	2

TABLE XXXI  
LAST RECORDED CASE OF DISEASE

Disease	Gnadenheim	Friedensdorf	Landskrone	Hierschau	Waldheim
Typhus	Before 1936	1932	1933	1933	1933
Scarlet fever	Before 1936	1930	—	1937	1937
Diphtheria	Before 1936	1930	—	1937	1937
Malaria	1936	1940	1941	1934	1940
T.B.	1941	1941	Still Present	1941	1941
Trachoma	1941	1941	—	1941	1940
Dysentery	1939	1932	1940	1940	1940
Chicken Pox	—	—	—	1941	—

TABLE XXXII  
LAND AREA

Village	Czarist Time		1941-1942	
	Hectares	Dess.	Hectares	Dess.
Gnadenheim	1920	1757	1510	1382
Friedensdorf	2000	1831	1445	1323
Landskrone	3368	3083	1800	1648
Hierschau	2280	2087	1454	1331
Waldheim	3100	2838	1700	1556

departed remained in Hierschau, not everything continued to operate as it had done previously.

The creamery no longer functioned, although the building still stood. It was empty and available as temporary quarters for the group of refugees from Tschongraw. The windmill was not in operation. "There was a pile of stones, and it was said to have burned down," commented a woman who lived in Hierschau during this time.<sup>19</sup> It was likely destroyed when the Soviets evacuated the area in 1941. The White Earth Pits were still there, but do not seem to have been exploited as a commercial enterprise. The school continued to function, still offering the first four grades, with older children walking to Waldheim to continue their education.<sup>20</sup>

Peter and Susanna Friesen visited Hierschau during the German occupation, and found it to be changed. All the mulberry hedges between the *Wirtschaften* had been removed. All the fences were gone. Many orchards and gardens had been chopped out. Even though Hierschau was part of a collective farm, a few of the people, such as Margaretha Wiebe (nee Fast), with her mother and two children, still lived in their original houses. Other places, such as Susanna Friesen's (nee Wiebe) former home, *Wirtschaft* No. 29, were occupied by Russians and Ukrainians.<sup>21</sup>

An accurate list of persons living in Hierschau during the German occupation is difficult to make; the known total of German people, according to the *Dorfkarte*, being 175. Margaret Klassen (nee Neufeld) was able to think of 146 people, consisting of 43 family units, 18 of these appearing to have fathers present.<sup>22</sup> Many, although certainly not all of these families were remnants of, or children of people who had previously owned *Wirtschaften* in Hierschau.

## The Crimean Gypsies

Tschongraw was a Mennonite village in the Crimea, originally founded in 1912.<sup>23</sup> The Soviets ordered its evacuation on August 16, 1941, with the inhabitants going to the station at Bijuk in wagons, then proceeding north by train.<sup>24</sup> Eventually they reached Zaporozhye just when the Germans were beginning to shell the city from across the Dniepr River. Abandoning the train, the Tschongraw group wandered on foot, in about one month arriving in the Molotschna.<sup>25</sup> Here they were apprehended, then quartered in Waldheim. On September 30, at least 13 of their men were marched away, probably being sent to northern Russian labour camps. Several days later the rest of the group was taken to the Stulnewo railroad station. Here, together with the 7,000 other villagers from the region, they awaited deportation.

But time ran out on the Soviets. They were unable to evacuate the people from Stulnewo, and when the German army overran the area on October 6, everyone simply headed back home. The Tschongraw group also left the station and headed south into the Molotschna — to Hierschau. Here a total of nine families (with 39 persons) were crammed into two rooms of the abandoned creamery. The families were (with most of the men missing by then):

Jakob Janzens  
Gerhard Toewses  
Franz Teichroeb  
Heinrich Hueberts  
Franz Klassens  
Nicholai Ennses  
Nicholai Hueberts  
Franz Warkentins (Jr.)  
Franz Warkentins (Sr.)

Each family chose a corner of a room in which to sleep. Since they had no furniture, and very little in the way of bedding, they slept on straw and used their coats to cover up against the night cold. The Tschongraw refugees were afraid to go out too much, and certainly could find no work, although they did occasionally beg. They scoured the surrounding fields, and found a few tomatoes which the frost had spared. This made an excellent sauce for the potatoes they had managed to dig out. Cooked in tin cans, the food was enough to make them very thankful to their heavenly Father that he was providing, and had saved them from the hand of the



enemy. A calf apparently wandered too near the creamery with its hungry inhabitants, and found its way into their makeshift cooking pots. This episode understandably caused a little tension between the Hierschauers and the Tschongraw group.

Probably because the refugees had very little, and what they possessed they had begged for, the Hierschauers nicknamed them *Daut Kjrimsche Tsjionepak* (Low German: That Crimean Gypsy Pack).

The native Hierschau population was itself struggling for existence, so there was little surplus food, fuel or other provision available for the "Gypsies." Several Tschongraw women went into the surrounding area to look for more suitable winter accommodations. Finding Tiege, a southern Molotschna village, almost completely abandoned because its inhabitants had been evacuated by the Soviets, they decided to move there. By October 26, using a wagon they had found in Tiege, the whole group had moved to their new-found homes.



## THE GREAT TREK: Chronology of Events

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| February 2, 1943                | — German Sixth Army capitulated in Stalingrad. Retreat underway.  |
| September 9 and 10, 1943        | — Molotschna mayors to obtain wagons for all families.  |
| September 11 and 12             | — Trek begins in the Molotschna.  |
| September 12                    | — Departure from Hierschau.   |
| September 19                    | — Arrival at Kachovka on the Dniepr. Wagons crossed the river on pontoon bridges  |
| September 26                    | — Arrival in Sagradowka area. Hierschau people quartered in Rachmanovka.  |
| October 25                      | — Further flight westward began.  |
| November                        | — Stopped three or four days in Winnitza (Vinnica). Women and children continued trip on trains.                        |
| Early December, 1943            | — Arrival in Podolia on the Russian-Polish border. Hierschau people quartered in Kamenetz Podolsk (Kamenec Podol'skij). |
| Late February/Early March, 1944 | — One week of travel to Warthegau area in Poland. Hierschau assigned to Kutno.  |
| September, 1944                 | — Total mobilization in Germany.  |
| January 17 and 18, 1945         | — Evacuated from the Warthegau area to Hermannsburg in Lower Saxony. Many settled in camp at Soltau.                    |
| May 8, 1945                     | — Unconditional surrender of the Third Reich.   |

Later in 1945

- 28 Hierschau families to a camp in  
Wolfsburg, then back to Russia,  
together with about 20,000 other  
Mennonites.

## XVIII THE GREAT TREK\*

### Advance and Retreat

After sweeping through the Molotschna, German forces continued their drive to the east. On October 7, 1941, Berdiansk and Mariupol on the Sea of Azov were captured, and on October 24, Kharkov was occupied. During the winter the Soviets pushed back the invaders in many sectors, but in the summer of 1942 the German armies again assumed the offensive. On August 19, 1942, General Paulus ordered the Sixth Army to attack Stalingrad. This was carried out, but at tremendous cost. Eventually the Sixth Army was encircled in Stalingrad, its remnants finally capitulating to the Soviets on February 2, 1943.<sup>1</sup> Ninety thousand German prisoners were taken. The Soviet forces now slowly, but surely, pushed the invading armies back. Soon the thunder of cannons and rocket signals could again be heard in the Molotschna, as the front approached from the east.

### Heading West

On September 9 and 10, 1943, the mayors of all the villages of the Molotschna received word to obtain wagons for every family. Covers were built for the wagons to give some protection against rain and snow. Chicken and pork were fried, flour, oil and syrup were packed to provide food on the way. On September 11 and 12 a full-scale retreat began — the Great Trek. Thousands of wagons, organized into village groups, under supervision of the mayors and the German occupation forces, started streaming westward.<sup>2</sup>

Hierschau also participated in the evacuation. Almost everyone, certainly those of Mennonite or German origin, packed up and joined the trek. Departure was apparently optional, although one gets the impression that some pressure was applied. Everyone had been instructed to put straw into the houses before they left. Several young men were to stay behind, probably to burn down the village once the population had departed. "On September 12," wrote one woman, "we started off with a wagon, four horses, a cow and sheep, in the rain and storm."<sup>3</sup> The Gerhard Pletts had a total of 21 people for one *Leiterwagen*, their own as well as the Sperling family. The Hierschau wagon train was joined by three families from Stalingrad, one of the men, a Mr. Fleischhauer, was appointed a group leader. In all, there were at least 31 family units in the Hierschau contingent from the village

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\*Known to most Mennonites as *Die Flucht*

TABLE XXXIII  
 HIRSCHAU PEOPLE ON THE TREK  
 (a very incomplete list)

Susanna Bergen with father-in-law Mr. Janzen  
 Kornelius Boschmann (*Schulze*) and wife Aganetha  
 Mrs. Delesky, son Gerhard and four other children  
 Mrs. Derksen (former shepherdess) and daughter Gredel  
 Daniel Derksen and wife  
 Jakob Derksen and wife  
 Margartha Fast (nee Plett), daughter Margaretha Wiebe, and two of  
 her daughters  
 Mrs. Hildebrand, son Erich and other children  
 Elisabeth Hildebrandt (wife of David Hildebrandt), with children  
 Gerhard, Jakob, Elisabeth, Katharina, Maria  
 Mrs. Hoge with daughters Anna and Jascha  
 Maria Huebner (wife of Wilhelm Huebner) and two sons  
 Jakob Janzen and daughter Tina  
 Mrs. I. Janzen with three sons and two daughters  
 Aganetha Kaethler (daughter of *Aeltester* Plett), with two sons and  
 daughter Hilda  
 Mrs. Martens (nee Siemens)  
 Anna Neufeld with children Margaret, Kornelius, Hilda, Gerhard,  
 Katharina, Johann, Erika, Frieda, Peter  
 Mrs. Bernhard Peters with her mother, Mrs. Siemens  
 Elisabeth Plett (nee Kroeker, wife of *Prediger* Gerhard K. Plett)  
 and four daughters  
 Mrs. Jakob Plett and five children  
 Katharina Plett (wife of *Aeltester* Plett), and daughters Maria,  
 Katharina, Enelse  
 Katharina Plett (wife of Gerhard Plett, who was son of the  
*Aeltester*) and children Gerhard, Johann, Maria, Heinrich  
 Sperling family, total of three  
 Anna Sukkau, daughter Tina Pauls and her daughter Frieda  
 Mrs. Thiessen with her daughter Margaretha  
 Mrs. Emma Thiessen with daughter-in-law and her children  
 Mrs. Jakob Thiessen (nee Zehrt) with children  
 Mrs. Warkentin and a daughter  
 Mrs. Warkentin  
 Mrs. Nina Warkentin with three children  
 Peter Warkentin with his foster daughter, Mrs. Dick

Gerhard Willms (Assistant *Schulze*), wife Katharina and children Kornelius and Frieda  
Fleishhauer family from Stalingrad and two other families from Stalingrad accompanied the Hierschau people.

itself, with over 110 people (see Table XXXIII).<sup>4</sup> Gerhard Delesky, Jakob Plett, Gerhard Plett and another young fellow were the four designated to remain behind in Hierschau. They themselves were not asked to put the torch to their home village, and eventually joined their families a few weeks later in the Sagraadowka region. When the Waldheim people proceeded west from their village, they streamed through a totally abandoned, but intact Hierschau.<sup>5</sup>

With the rumble of the approaching front distinctly heard in the east, the wagon trains steadily headed westward. Despite broken wheels, runaway horses and cows, tipping or even going on the wrong road, all arrived at Kachovka on the Dniepr in seven days. Day and night the wagons crossed the wide river using two pontoon bridges under supervision of German soldiers. After a day of rest on the safer west bank of the Dniepr at Berislav, another six hard days of travel brought them to the Sagraadowka region. Here the weary travellers were settled in the various villages of the area, the Hierschau people staying in Rachmanovka, a Jewish village. They stayed about a month, helping in the plowing and sowing of winter wheat.

But the situation again became critical. The Red Army had crossed the Dniepr River, so on October 25 a further trek began. Conditions were terrible, with rain, snow, cold, rutted muddy roads, and great difficulty in obtaining fodder for the horses and cattle. Tina Pauls recalls that the horses became tired and sick, the cows were lost and the sheep were butchered. Despite undaunted courage exhibited particularly by the women, when they reached Winnitza (Vinnica), still in the Ukraine, they could go no further. The trip had been particularly difficult for the sick and elderly, a number having already died on the way. At Winnitza they rested two or three days, then the women and children were put onto trains to continue their journey. The men continued at a slower pace with the wagons. Finally in early December, the various groups dragged themselves to their destination, Podolia, on the Russian-Polish border. The people were again sheltered in local villages, the Hierschau group being quartered at Kamenetz Podolsk (Kamenec Podol'skij).

The relentless Soviet advance continued, and by late February

the front was again approaching. Russian partisan activities also made life more dangerous. Since most refugees had no wagons by this time, they were put onto trains and transported further west. The last trains were almost captured by the rapidly advancing Soviet forces, although all Hierschauerers eventually made it. Travel by this time was difficult, but after a week the refugees arrived in the Warthegau area, west of Warsaw. By the middle of March 1944, 200,000 Russian Germans, including 35,000 Mennonites, had been resettled, this time into an area which was presumed to be safe. The Hierschau villagers had largely stayed together as a group. They cleaned themselves up, were deloused at a camp in Litzmannstadt (Lodz), and then together with thousands of other refugees were distributed to various villages and farms in the area. The Hierschau people were assigned to Kutno, north of Lodz.

There had been earlier periods when refugees were drafted into the German military, with Gerhard and Jakob Hildebrandt among those from Hierschau who were in uniform. In September, 1944, there was a total mobilization in Germany. Almost all men between the ages of 16 and 65 were drafted, including any eligible refugees. No one asked about the Mennonite nonresistant status, and few thought about insisting on it. Gerhard Plett and his younger brother Johann, Kornelius Willms, Jakob Thiessen, Jakob Dyck, Heinrich Warkentin, Jakob Plett, Erich Hildebrand, Kornelius Boschmann and Kornelius Neufeld as well as non-German men in the Hierschau group were called up. Soon the Plett brothers were marching westward to join the German offensive in the Ardennes. In this Christmas conflict, called the Battle of the Bulge, Gerhard was killed, but Johann survived. He was then transferred to the Hungarian front. Kornelius Willms was captured by the Allies and kept in a prisoner of war camp in France, then later exchanged back into Russian custody after the war.

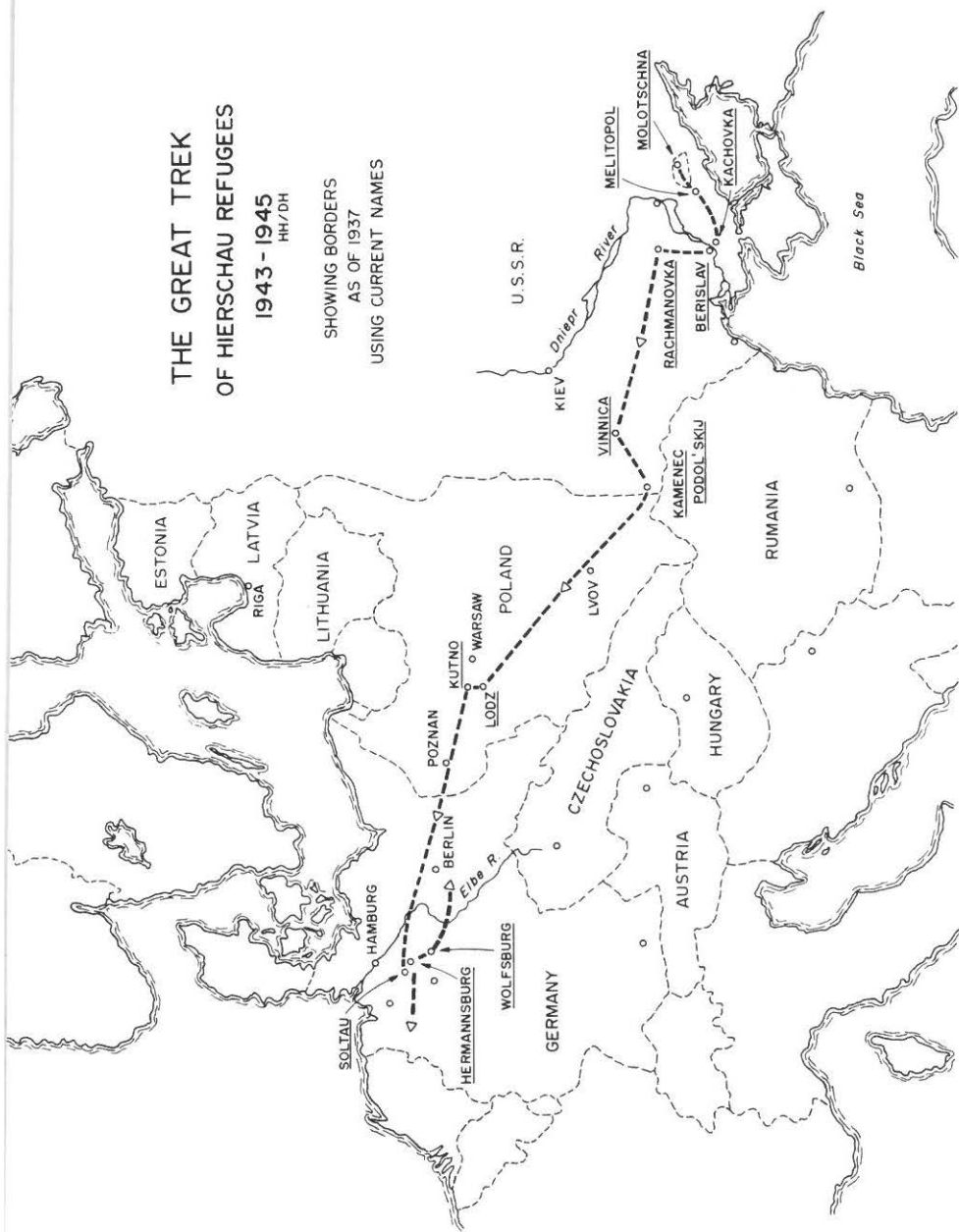
For the refugees the relative safety of the new location did not last. On January 17 and 18, 1945, orders came to evacuate the Warthegau area. Russian armoured columns were crashing through the German defences, making it impossible to organize an orderly retreat. Train service was irregular and farmer's wagons were already full, leaving little room for the refugees. The roads were clogged, it was cold, the people had poor clothing, and to add to the misery, enemy aircraft bombed and strafed the long columns. Sorrow and suffering accompanied the evacuation, and many people died. Most of the Hierschau villagers again travelled as a group, possibly by train, since they were able to take along some of their belongings.



# THE GREAT TREK OF HIERSCHAU REFUGEES

1943 - 1945  
HH/DH

SHOWING BORDERS  
AS OF 1937  
USING CURRENT NAMES



Tina Pauls, for some reason separated from the main Hierschau group, had to find her own way. She wrote:

There were no more trains, the Russians had surrounded everything. The Hierschauer were already gone, so mother, daughter and I started off on foot in the middle of the night. Handbag at my side, my five year old daughter, my 71 year old mother and I walked through storm weather, snow and ice. The German police put mother onto a wagon, then I also pushed my daughter on, and I continued to walk until finally I could also ride  
...<sup>6</sup>

The trek led to Lower Saxony, to the region of the village Hermannsburg. Many of the Hierschau people were quartered in a camp at Soltau, although Tina Pauls preferred to stay with a farmer about 30 kilometers away. Her mother Anna Sukkau did mending, Tina worked on the farm, and young daughter Frieda went to school. Tina visited the other Hierschauer at the camp in Soltau and brought them potatoes and eggs, since they did not have enough to eat.

Most of the Hierschau villagers had withstood the rigours of the *Flucht*, although not without great difficulty. But a number of graves dotted the trail from Hierschau to Soltau. Mrs. Martens (nee Siemens), a Mrs. Warkentin and a Mrs. Thiessen died, as well as Daniel Derksen and Mr. Janzen, father-in-law of Susanna Bergen. Peter Warkentin had severe diarrhoea and was very weak, so he was unable to make it back onto the train and was left to die. A twelve month old girl, which the Janzens had accepted from relatives, had severe ear infection and did not survive.

## The Return

Many Mennonite refugees had been overrun by the Soviet forces earlier in the Trek and were collected in camps in Poland, then returned to Russia. Those who made it to Germany but not over the Elbe River, who were therefore in Soviet-occupied territory, were also collected into camps and returned to their motherland. The Soviets, however, also started rounding up displaced persons in the Allied zones of Germany, often with the assistance of the Allied forces.<sup>7</sup> These people were also returned "home", often against their own will. In this way 20,000 of the 35,000 Mennonites who had started on the *Flucht* were sent back to Russia,<sup>8</sup> mostly to the high north or to Siberia.

The Hierschau group had made it safely into the Allied oc-

cupied zone, but now the Soviets applied pressure for them to return to their own native village. Looking at the conditions around them in Germany, some people reasoned that this might not be such a bad alternative. Most of the Hierschau families, according to one source at least 28 of them, registered with the Soviets to return to Russia.

A number of families, however, disagreed with the majority. Tina Pauls, living outside the camp, absolutely refused to join her compatriots and stayed in Germany with her mother and daughter. Gerhard Willms, his wife and daughter, also remained, although they had to go into hiding to do so. Kornelius and Aganetha Boschmann also stayed, as did Anna Neufeld with her nine children. Katharina Plett (wife of *Aeltester* Plett) with her three single daughters Maria, Katharina and Enelse, as well as her married daughter Aganetha Kaethler with three children, also managed to remain in Germany.<sup>9</sup> Some of the young men who had been drafted into the German Army, and were therefore separated from their families when the war ended, also avoided the Soviet dragnet.

The 28 Hierschau families who had registered with the Soviets were taken into custody and transferred to a camp further east in Wolfsburg, then transported into Soviet occupied territory.

## Home?

While the Hierschau group had been promised a return to their own home village, very few were actually allowed to go back. Perhaps one couple finally did make it, although they must have found only smoldering ruins. It is now claimed that the retreating German army burned most of Hierschau to the ground.

Instead of returning home, the Hierschauers were spread throughout northern Russia and Siberia — most realizing too late that there had never been any Soviet intention to actually allow them to return to their homes. A number of families were sent to Novosibirsk. The David Hildebrandt and the Gerhard Plett families found themselves in Rotschegda, area Kotlas, 300 kilometres from Archangel in the far north. Of the Gerhard Plett family, daughter Maria died of typhus and tuberculosis in 1948, while her mother Katharina finally died in 1963. Daughter Katharina still lives in Russia, while son Heinrich came out of Russia in 1979 and now lives in Germany. Many people of Hierschau, however, were never heard from again. The vast Gulag Archipelago swallowed them up without leaving a trace behind.



## XIX AFTERWARDS

Things have changed in Hierschau. Of the old village homes only one house remains, originally the home of a *Kleinwirt* at the Landskrone end, north side of the street. One piece of decorative fence reminds passers-by of former times. The current occupants of the village claim that the retreating German army burned most of the buildings to the ground in 1943. Most of the houses in present day Hierschau have been built since 1960.<sup>1</sup>

The name has again changed. Hierschau is now called Vladovka 2,<sup>2</sup> with Waldheim, less than a kilometer away, being Vladovka 1. This probably reflects the fact that Hierschau now functions as a suburb of Waldheim.

Administratively Vladovka 2 is within the Chernigov District of the Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> This district is described as being in the valley of the Tokmak River and its tributaries. Total population (in 1970) is 28,200 with 20,800 being rural inhabitants. Most of the 7,400 urban dwellers are in the principle city of the area, Chernigovka. Total land area is 1,200 square kilometers, with 45 population centres under the jurisdiction of district and village Soviets. There are 11 collective and two state farms cultivating 91,300 hectares of land. In addition, there are six enterprises, three building organizations, 36 schools and 45 houses of culture and clubs in the district.

Vladovka 1 (Waldheim) is the centre of a village Soviet and is situated 20 kilometers south-east of Chernigovka. A road which connects Chernigovka to the Zaporozhye-Berdiansk highway passes through the village of 1,162 people. Vladovka 1 boasts a high school, a library and a house of culture. There is a 50 bed hospital (still the old buildings from the Mennonite era) and an Association of Knowledge. Vladovka 1 is the administrative centre of the Gorki Collective Farm (named after the well-known writer, Maxim Gorki). The farm has 9,900 hectares of land, of which 7,500 are cultivated. Principle products are said to be vegetables and cattle. In the village there is a branch office of the Agricultural Technological Institute. Two citizens, veterans of the collective farm, have been honoured by receiving the Order of Lenin.

Other villages in the Gorki Collective Farm are Kamianka (Hamborg), Stepove, Stulneve (Stulnewo) and the hamlets surrounding Stulneve. Hierschau, only 0.8 kilometers from the main village, is considered to be part of Vladovka 1.

A wide, two lane, paved road forms the main street of Hierschau. On a hot summer afternoon a lazy horse slowly pulls a rubber-tired wagon down the street. The elderly driver is in no



The only remaining original house in Hierschau



Fragment of old decorative fence

# CHERNIGOV

## DISTRICT

HH/DH

RAILROAD  
HIGHWAY  
SECONDARY ROAD

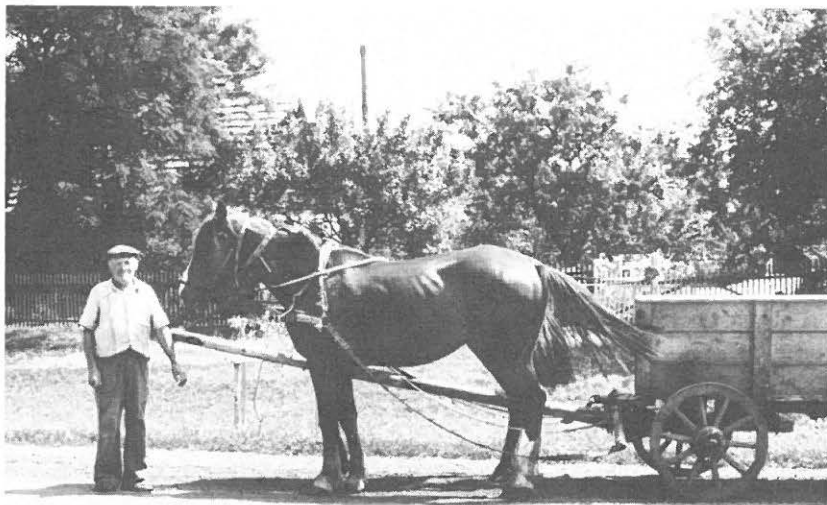


SPELLING : RUSSIAN

SOURCE : HISTORY OF CITIES AND VILLAGES OF THE  
UKRAINIAN SOCIALIST REPUBLIC, ZAPOROZHYE  
PROVINCE, p.679

SOUTH-WESTERN HALF OF THE DISTRICT IS ROUGHLY  
THE EASTERN HALF OF THE MOLOTSCHNA

BOGDANOVKA - GNADENFELD POSTORO - GROSSWEIDE  
PANFILOVKA - MARIENTHAL DOVGO - KONTENIUSFELD



Wagon on the Hierschau street



Manure spreader on the way to Waldheim



hurry, and gladly stops to chat with anyone he meets. This is in sharp contrast to a big manure spreader, pulled by a diesel tractor, which rumbles by, likely on its way to the collective machine shed.

The 100 foot wide street is lined by cement hydro poles on each side, lower portions painted white. Beyond them are small trees in a number of areas, lower trunks also white, and then is the ungravelled sidewalk. All yards have fences, some wooden picket, others wire or metal. Flowers occasionally cheer up the street, but most yards have only fruit trees along the side of the house or in the front. Houses are all one storey high with the general appearance much the same as the original Mennonite buildings, although the large barns are missing. Roofs are of corrugated iron, or in a few instances, tiled. Most houses are white, many with blue trim. Not nearly all the lots are filled, particularly on the south side of the street. There are about 30 houses on the north side, perhaps half that number on the south. Large bold house numbers, north side of the street being the even ones, are easily visible from the road. Numbering begins at the Waldheim end, having approached 100 by the time the Landskrone end is reached 1.9 kilometers down the street. Only the houses on the north side of the street have gardens behind their yards, extending the additional 150 yards to the river. Behind the yards on the south side are open fields, with no trace of the Hierschau forest remaining.

The Begim-Tschokrak River still flows past Hierschau, about 200 yards north of the street. In summer it is a lazy stream, nowhere more than ten feet wide. Most of the bridges which formerly crossed this rivulet are no longer there. No trace, not even a pile of stones, remains of the windmill. The creamery was probably blown up when the German army retreated, and has never been rebuilt. The White Earth Pits were closed about 1970, and a forest now grows in this hilly area. Nothing remains of the old school building; all Hierschau children now go to school in Waldheim. A small general store was opened up in Hierschau about 1969. It stands in the centre of the village, north side of the street.

The main activities of the Gorki Collective Farm, at least according to the workers interviewed in Hierschau, are cattle breeding and growing winter wheat. They grow a considerable amount of corn (maize) to feed the cattle. All aspects of cattle raising seem to be emphasized, including the actual breeding, as well as beef and milk production. Hierschau is certainly involved in these programs. There is a large field of corn just north of the Begim-Tschokrak River, and beyond that are large cattle corrals. About one kilometer south of the village are a number of large cat-



Current Hierschau householder in front of her yard



The general store in Hierschau

SMALL HILL WITH FOREST

SITE OF ABANDONED  
WHITE EARTH PITS

CATTLE CORRALS

PREVIOUS SITE OF  
WINDMILL

CORN FIELD

PREVIOUS SITE OF  
CREAMERY

*Begim-Tschokrak River*

LANDSKRONE 1.8 KM

ONLY REMAINING HOUSE  
FROM THE OLD VILLAGE

GENERAL STORE

REMAINING PIECE OF  
OLD FENCE

WALDHEIM

0.8 KM

BRIDGE

POND

CATTLE SHEDS

HAYSTACKS

OLD CEMETERY

NEW CEMETERY

# HIERSCHAU

IN 1982

HH/DH

(NOT ALL HOUSES AND  
YARDS DRAWN IN)

tle sheds (see map). Up to four different types of winter wheat are grown on the collective farm. Fruits and vegetables are also produced, but only for private use. Apples, plums, peaches, melons, watermelons, grapes and raspberries grow in profusion. Diets are obviously supplemented by the protein from fowl, judging by the flocks of ducks and gaggles of geese that can be seen in the area.

A large collective farm such as Gorki can have groups of people specializing in various aspects of the operation. Each able bodied inhabitant is assigned to a specific department. In the morning they gather at a designated area, then are given their tasks for the day.<sup>4</sup> The tractor pool, for example, is looked after by a group of mechanics supervised by a team leader. In this way every aspect of the farm work is controlled and closely supervised. While earnings are probably reasonable, they are obviously supplemented by individual garden plots and the raising of smaller farm animals.

\* \* \*

The last stop on my visit to Hierschau was the cemetery. It is about a kilometer south of the village, on the open steppe. The new section, although not well groomed, is still in use, with well marked grave sites and commemorative plaques. The old section, dating from Mennonite times, is a rough patch of ground, overgrown by weeds, brambles and small bushes. No specific graves are marked. No commemorative stones remain. The stones are said to have been used to build a bridge nearby.

I stood on the ground where, somewhere, my grandfather and grandmother are buried. I looked north past the large collective cattle sheds, past the collective haystacks, at the village nestled in the trees, simmering in the summer heat. In my heart I felt close to the spirit of my forefathers. I could almost hear the grunt of effort as a plow was held straight in the rich soil. I could almost feel the sweat trickle down the brow with the labour of pitching ripened sheaves of grain onto the *Leiterwagen*. I could almost taste the delicious steaming borscht prepared by the skillful housewife of a busy *Wirtschaft*. That was the Hierschau of old. That was Hierschau, the Example. That was Hierschau, the example of a rich agricultural heritage, cradled in the framework of a firm belief that God would surely bless his hard working, soil loving children. That was a Hierschau which was gone.

Before me lay Vladovka 2, an example of the new spirit of the land. A few traces of the old remained, but the village was a fully integrated cog in the wheels of the new economy. Cattle lowed in



The former boss of the tractor pool, family and friends

their sheds, the ripening corn waved in the gentle breeze, while diesel tractors purred on the field.

The real, the abiding Hierschau, was no longer there. It was eking out an existence near Archangel. It was sweating in a coal mine in Karaganda. It was also preaching to a congregation in West Germany. It was teaching high school students in Kitchener. It was cultivating the rich soil in Henderson. It was coordinating a mission office in Hillsboro. It was tutoring university students in Seattle. It was singing Brahms' Requiem with Robert Shaw in Winnipeg. It was harvesting raspberries in the Fraser Valley.

As my taxi sped back to Zaporozhye, and it had to speed because I had overstayed the time at my ancestral home, I knew that Hierschau had indeed been a model and an example. But in the long term, it had not turned out quite the way Johann Cornies had planned it.



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# END NOTES

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29. William Schroeder, Winnipeg, personal interview, information from contemporary diaries.
30. Jacob Quiring, *Die Mundart von Chortitza in Sued-Russland*, (Munich: Druckerei Studentenhaus Muenchen, Universitaet, 1928), pp. 9-12. Specific number of settlers given by different authors varies considerably. David Rempel puts the total at 346 families, Ehrt at 423 families.
31. Urry, Abstract, pp. I-II.

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27. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 11 June 1902, p. 1.
28. Report, *MR*, 15 July 1883, p. 1.
29. Report, *Mennonitische Blaetter*, July 1856, p. 51.
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31. *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, Vol. 18, p. 240.
32. H. Goerz, *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung*, (Steinbach, Manitoba: Echo-Verlag, 1950), p. 15.
33. *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, Vol. 16, p. 476.
34. Urry, p. 104, mentions the gypsies, including some of their activities. The hedgehog story is from a later resident of Hierschau.
35. According to Ehrst and Isaac the 1804 group was 162 families. Giesinger mentions 161, Urry 165, while Rempel mentions 166.

36. Goerz, pp. 9-10.
37. Giesinger estimates 411, Ehrh 448, Quiring 461, Rempel 464.
38. Goerz, pp. 13-14.
39. Reproduced by Goerz, p. 13.
40. *Zhurnal Ministerstva Gosudarstvennykh Imushchestv* (Journal of the Ministry of State Domain), VI (1842), p. 46.
41. Numbers again vary from author to author.  
     Giesinger: 40 families arrived in 1833 to found Gnadenfeld.  
               68 families arrived in 1836 to found Waldheim.  
     Quiring: 26 families arrived in 1834, another 40 families in 1835 to found Gnadenfeld and Waldheim.  
     Ehrh agrees with Quiring.  
     Urry: 66 families arrived in 1834 to found Gnadenfeld.  
           68 families arrived in 1836 to found Waldheim.
42. *Zhurnal M.G.I.* VI (1842), p. 46. Numbers of villages varies, depending on exactly what is counted. I have not counted Neuhaltstadt as a separate village, nor some of the larger farming establishments. My count therefore is 44 villages in 1840, with another 11 founded subsequently.
43. Professor Al Reimer, University of Winnipeg, interview. Professor Reimer is the great great grandson of Klaas Reimer.
44. Goerz, pp. 58-61.
45. Urry, Abstract, p. I.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
47. David H. Epp, *Johann Cornies*, (Rosthern, Saskatchewan: Echo-Verlag, 1946), p. 5.
48. Gavel, agronomist. Biography of Johann Cornies, originally printed in *UB*, October 1848. Translated and edited by Harvey L. Dyck, published in *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2 (1984): 34-35.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
50. Johann Cornies, "Ueber die landwirtschaftlichen Fortschritte im Molotschnaer Mennoniten-Bezirke in dem Jahre 1845," *UB*, May 1846, p. 10, translated and quoted by Harvey L. Dyck in "Russian Servitor and Mennonite Hero: Light and Shadow in Images of Johann Cornies," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2 (1984): 10.
51. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, "Johann Cornies" by Walter Quiring.
52. Harvey L. Dyck, "Russian Servitor and Mennonite Hero: Light and Shadow in Images of Johann Cornies", *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 2 (1984): 10.
53. Goerz, pp. 43-44.
54. Molotschna Report, *Mennonitische Blaetter*, March 1855, p. 19.
55. Goerz, p. 45.
56. Epp, pp. 58-68.
57. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, "Johann Cornies" by Walter Quiring.
58. Urry, pp. 279-280.
59. Gavel, pp. 33-34.
60. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, "Johann Cornies" by Walter Quiring.

### CHAPTER III

1. *New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 6, pp. 858-860 and Vol. 11, pp. 549-553.  
     A currently available edition is *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953.)
2. News Report, *UB*, November 1848, p. 81.
3. J.J. Hildebrand, *Hildebrand's Zeittafel* (Winnipeg: 1945), p. 196.

4. Ibid., p. 197.
5. Fuerstenwerder Village Report, originally printed in *Odessaer Zeitung* No. 197 in 1904, reprinted by J. Stach, and also later reprinted in the *MR*.
6. Waldheim Village Report, *Odessaer Zeitung*, No. 229, 1904, also reprinted by Stach and the *MR*.
7. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
8. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 8 January 1902, p. 2.
9. Landskrone Village Report, *Odessaer Zeitung*, No. 231, 1904.
10. *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, "Hierschau", by David H. Epp.
11. On an unofficial document signed by village mayor Duerksen on 21 June 1916, *Premarno* was the name given. This was after the Czarist government had compelled the Mennonites to abandon German names of their villages.
12. This information was given in strictest confidence, and while the specific source of information is well documented, it will not be revealed. Even now, half a century later, it is feared that disciplinary action might be taken by his church. The pastor may rest assured that the informant now has a contrite heart, feeling true repentance, and would not repeat this procedure.
13. Waldheim Village Report.
14. Landskrone Village Report.
15. Molotschna Report, *UB*, Beilage 1857, p. 26. David Epp, in the *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, mentions 1932 dessiatines, or 64.4 per Wirtschaft. Franz Isaac, in *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten*, pp. 72-73 lists it as 1981 dessiatines.
16. According to the Land Ukaz of March 19, 1764 it was Russian government policy that the land given foreign colonists was not given to them personally, but to the village as a whole. The colonists could not divide, sell or mortgage even the smallest part of their allotment. The youngest son was to inherit the land, it being presumed that the older sons would be looked after prior to the handing over of the family farm. Mennonites, however, were allowed certain concessions. All heirs had an equal opportunity to bid on the whole unit, and the highest bidder became the owner. This owner would then compensate the other members of the family, usually by payment or money.
17. This was the procedure followed in Konteniusfeld and Landskrone and a number of other villages, as described in the village reports of 1848.
18. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, "Hierschau", by David H. Epp.
19. Report, *UB*, October 1852, p. 8.
20. Molotschna Report, *UB*, May 1849, Beilage, p. 3.
21. Landskrone, mentioned previously, had 26 families settling in 1839, another 11 in 1840, and the final three in 1842.
22. Michael Duerksen, letter, *MR*, 14 September 1910, p. 5.
23. Jacob Quiring, *Die Mundart von Chortitza in Sued-Russland* (Munich: Drukerei Studentenhaus Muenchen, Universitaet, 1928), pp. 44-45.
24. Molotschna Report, *UB*, 1857, Beilage, p. 26. Jakob Hubert is listed as teacher, but other sources spell it Hiebert.
25. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
26. A. Klaus, *Unsere Kolonien* (Odessa: *Odessaer Zeitung*, 1887), p. 243.
27. Johann Willms, personal interview.
28. Report, *UB*, February 1849, p. 2.
29. Report, *UB*, February 1849, p. 11.
30. Molotschna Report, *UB*, May 1849, Beilage, p. 3.
31. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, "Hierschau", by David H. Epp.
32. Molotschna Report, *UB*, May 1852, Beilage, p. 4.
33. Rempel, p. 126. In 1836, with the Russian wool trade at its peak, there were 107,895 sheep in the Molotschna. With competition from other wool pro-

- ducing countries the Russian share in the market decreased. Reflecting this trend, by 1843 the number of sheep in the Molotschna was down slightly to 97,908, and dropped even further to 71,340 by 1855.
34. Report, *UB*, January 1852.
  35. Report, *UB*, May 1852, Beilage, p. 1.
  36. Report, *UB*, January 1852.
  37. Report, *UB*, May 1855, p. 36.
  38. H.J. Thiessen, letter *MR*, 30 January 1901, p. 2.
  39. Report, *UB*, May 1852, Beilage p. 7.
  40. Subscriber List, *UB*, January 1851, p. 2.
  41. Molotschna Report, *UB*, May 1852, Beilage p. 7. Wage earning age was usually considered to be from 14 to 60 years. Molotschna wage earners were 7,988 out of a total population of 16,357. Using a similar proportion, 118 Hierschau wage earners would give a total population of about 242.
  42. Obituary, Margaretha Baerg (nee Hildebrand), *Zionsbote*, 6 January 1926, p. 10.
  43. H. J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 8 January 1902, p. 2.

### TOBIAS SPERLING

1. Horst Penner, *Die ost und west preussischen Mennoniten* (Karlsruhe: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein E.V., 1978), p. 458.
2. Katharina Unruh (nee Sperling) the wife of another original Hierschau settler came from Waldheim. She could have been the sister of Tobias, although this is speculation only.
3. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 1 April 1903, p. 5.
4. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 30 January 1901, p. 2.
5. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 8 January 1902, p. 2.
6. Peter and Anna Warkentin, letter, *MR*, 18 January 1905, p. 9.
7. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.

### CHAPTER IV

1. A. Klaus, *Unsere Kolonien* (Odessaer Zeitung, 1887), p. 226.
2. David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia: A Sketch of its Founding and Endurance, 1789-1919", *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 47 (October 1973), pp. 259-308, and concluded in 48 (January 1974), pp. 5-54.
3. Adam Giesinger, *From Catherine to Khrushchev* (Winnipeg: 1974), pp. 183-199.
4. David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia: A Study of their Settlement and Economic Development from 1789 to 1914" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1933), pp. 113-118.
5. Adolf Ehrt, *Das Mennonitentum in Russland* (Berlin, Leipzig: Julius Belz, 1932), p. 36.
6. Report, *UB*, January 1858, p. 3.
7. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 1 January 1903, p. 12.
8. Franz Isaac, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten* (Halbstadt, Taurien: H.J. Braun, 1908), p. 87.
9. J.J. Hildebrand, *Hildebrand's Zeittafel* (Winnipeg: 1945), p. 196.

10. James Urry, "The Closed and the Open: Social and Religious Change Amongst the Mennonites in Russia (1789-1889)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1978), pp. 402-409.
11. Isaac, p. 87.
12. H. Goerz, *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung* (Steinbach, Manitoba: Echo-Verlag, 1950), pp. 182-183.
13. Urry, pp. 172-176.
14. Goerz, p. 16.
15. Ibid., p. 45.
16. Urry, pp. 176-177.
17. D.H. Epp, *Johann Cornies* (Rosthern, Saskatchewan: Echo-Verlag, 1946), p. 87.
18. Rempel, p. 127.
19. Klaus, p. 244, using numbers largely taken from the Molotschna Report, *UB*, May 1852, Beilage p. 7, 8.
20. Molotschna Report, *UB*, May 1850, p. 36.
21. Molotschna Report, *Mennonitische Blaetter*, July 1856, p. 52.
22. Molotschna Report, *UB*, August 1851, p. 62 and *UB*, February 1856, p. 13.
23. Molotschna Report, *Mennonitische Blaetter*, July 1856, p. 51.
24. Molotschna Report, *UB*, July 1855, p. 56.
25. Ibid., p. 56.
26. Molotschna Report, *Mennonitische Blaetter*, May 1857, p. 32.
27. News Report, *UB*, July 1846, p. 24.
28. Molotschna Report, *UB*, July 1855, p. 56.
29. D.J. Duerksen, personal letters.
30. Maria Wall, personal interview.
31. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
32. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 8 January 1902, p. 2.
33. Goerz, pp. 63-64.
34. Ibid., pp. 62-63.
35. Urry, pp. 299-301.
36. J.A. Toews, *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), pp. 29-32.
37. Jakob Bekker, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, Kansas: The Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, 1973), pp. 39, 40.
38. P.M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*. Translated from the German. (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), pp. 230-232.
39. Ibid., p. 233.
40. Bekker, pp. 50-51.
41. Ibid., p. 69.
42. Elizabeth Sudermann Klassen, *Trailblazer for the Brethren* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1978) gives the story of Johann Claassen and his attempts to obtain official recognition.
43. Toews, p. 52.
44. Bekker, p. 46.
45. Sources if the statistics are:  
     Molotschna Reports, *UB*, April 1846, p. 3; May 1850, p. 36; August 1851, p. 61; May 1852, Beilage, p. 1; July 1855, p. 59.  
     Reports, *Mennonitische Blaetter*, May 1854, p. 28; March 1855, p. 17; July 1856, p. 51; May 1857, p. 31.  
     Klaus, p. 236.
46. Canadian information obtained from Statistics Canada.
47. News Report, *MR*, 19 December 1888, p. 1.
48. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 1 January 1903, p. 12.
49. Rempel, p. 214.
50. Report, *Mennonitische Blaetter*, May 1857.

51. Report, *UB*, 1857, Beilage, p. 26.
52. Urry, Table 9, following p. 639.
53. *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, Vol. 2, p. 312.
54. Obituary, Katharina Schmidt (nee Regier), *Zionsbote*, 27 September 1922, p. 12. Katharina Regier was the daughter of Johann J. Regier.
55. Klaus, p. 236.
56. Report, *UB*, July 1855, p. 59.
57. Rempel, p. 186.
58. Urry, p. 623.
59. Molotschna Report, *UB*, May 1852, Beilage, p. 1.
60. Urry, p. 619.
61. Goerz, pp. 110-115.
62. Urry, p. 639.
63. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 1 January 1903, p. 12.
64. Isaac, pp. 72-73. Numbers vary slightly from source to source. *UB* statistics listed the original 1848 Hirschau land at 1993 dessiatines. Possibly small adjustments were made from time to time.
65. Goerz, pp. 117-118. Dates vary from author to author, some recording date of purchase, others date of settlement.

## CHAPTER V

1. *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Vol. X, *The Zenith of European Power 1830-70* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 468-492.
2. Kirchner, Walther, *History of Russia* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 186-189.
3. P.M. Friesen, pp. 576-78.
4. H. Goerz, *Die mennonitische Siedlungen der Krim* (Winnipeg: Echo-Verlag, 1957), p. 14.
5. *Mennonite Encyclopaedia*, "Crimea" by Th. Brandt and Cornelius Krahn.
6. See Sources listed for Table IV.
7. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 9 May 1900, p. 1.
8. See Sources listed for Tables I and IV.
9. J.A. Toews, p. 141.
10. *Mennonite Encyclopaedia*, "Bruderfeld Mennonite Brethren Church" by H.S. Bender.
11. Toews, p. 158.
12. See Sources listed for Table I and for biographies of Peter and Johann Regier.
13. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 10 October 1900, p. 2, 4.
14. Obituary, Bernhard S. Harms, *Zionsbote*, 23 June 1915, p. 7.
15. James Urry, pp. 648-686.
16. H. Goerz, *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung* (Steinbach, Manitoba: Echo-Verlag, 1950), pp. 123-24.
17. Kempes Schnell, "John F. Funk, 1835-1930, and the Mennonite Migration of 1873-1875," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 24 (July 1950): 119-229.
18. C. Henry Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites* (Berne, Indiana: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927), pp. 49-76.
19. Report on the development of the Beatrice, Nebraska, Church, *MR*, 18 June 1924, p. 7.
20. Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1981), pp. 200-204.
21. Franz Isaac, pp. 321-23.
22. Urry, pp. 673-75.

23. Numbers given are those of Cornelius J. Dyck. James Urry in table 10a lists specific numbers as: to Canada 6931; to the United States, Mennonites from Russia about 6000-7000. He feels that the commonly given total of 10,000 includes Mennonites from Wolhynia and Hutterites from Russia.
24. Urry, Table 10a, after page 673.
25. Stanley E. Voth, *Henderson Mennonites* (Henderson Centennial Committee, 1975), pp. 237-255.
26. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 1 January 1903, p. 12.
27. Obituary, Maria Buller (nee Lohrenz), *Zionsbote*, 19 May 1924, p. 11.
28. David Buller, letter, *MR*, 24 June 1903, p. 4. 5.
29. H.J. Thiessen complained of this a number of times in his letters to the *MR*.
30. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 17 December 1902, p. 10.
31. *Ibid*.
32. Report, *MR*, 19 February 1881, p. 1. A list of 65 families or individuals is given, from 21 villages or areas, most from the Molotschna.
33. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 17 December 1902, p. 10.
34. Plett Family History.
35. H. Goerz, *Memrik, Eine mennonitische Kolonie in Russland* (Rosthern, Saskatchewan: Echo-Verlag, 1954), p. 10.
36. Report, *MR*, 11 April 1888, p. 1. In this group of settlers were also six from Waldheim, five from Landskrone, four from Klippenfeld, 14 from other Molotschna villages and five from Memrik itself.
37. Fast Family History, Elizabeth Fedrau, personal letter, 1983.
38. Plett Family History.
39. Obituary, Helena Janz (nee Boese), *Zionsbote*, 4 November 1936, p. 10, 11.
40. Wall Family History.
41. Plett Family History.
42. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 17 December 1902, p. 10.
43. Maria Wall, personal interview.
44. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 23 January 1901, p. 5.
45. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 17 December 1902, p. 10.
46. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 13 July 1904, p. 4.
47. Peter and Anna Warkentin, letter, *MR*, 30 April 1913, p. 9.
48. Obituary, Peter Isaak Wall, *MR*, 28 August 1929, p. 9.

#### JOHANN J. REGIER

1. H.R. and Susanna Nickel, letter, *MR*, 10 September 1902, p. 4. Susanna Nickel was definitely the sister of Johann Regier. Another woman, Anna Friesen, definitely a Regier and possibly a sister of Johann, was born in Gnadenheim, September 17, 1838. Either one of the birth dates is inaccurate, the time between the dates given being six months, or they are not siblings. It is possible that there were two Regier families who moved from Gnadenheim to Hierschau.
2. Obituary, Johann J. Regier by his son Johann S. Regier, *Zionsbote*, 20 August 1902, p. 5.
3. Obituary, Mrs. Peter Unruh (nee Susanna Regier), *Zionsbote*, 28 January 1925, p. 11.
4. Obituary, Katharina Schmidt (nee Regier), *Zionsbote*, 27 September 1922, p. 12.
5. John H. Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, Kansas: The Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1950), p. 317.
6. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 1 January 1903, p. 12.
7. P.M. Friesen, pp. 516-520.
8. Clarence Hiebert, *The Henderson Mennonite Brethren 1878-1978* (Henderson, Nebraska: Centennial Committee of the Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1979), pp. 91-97.



9. Clarence Hiebert, *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1974), p. 360.
10. Lohrenz, p. 317.
11. Clarence Hiebert, *The Henderson Mennonite Brethren*, p. 12.
12. J.A. Toews, pp. 138, 196.
13. Lohrenz, pp. 69, 70, 72, 73, 83, 316, 317.
14. Johann J. Regier, Report, *Zionsbote*, 24 July 1895, p. 4.
15. Johann J. Regier, Report, *Zionsbote*, 11 August 1895, p. 4.
16. Wilhelm Loewen, Report, *Zionsbote*, 22 January 1896, p. 3.
17. News Report, *Zionsbote*, 24 June 1896, p. 6.
18. Obituary, Johann S. Regier, *Zionsbote*, 4 September 1918, p. 11.
19. News Report, *Zionsbote*, 12 August 1896, p. 4.
20. A.H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde* (Hillsboro, Kansas: Fuersorgekomitee der Generalkonferenz von Nord-Amerika, 1954), p. 448.
21. H.R. and Susanna Nickel, letter, *MR*, 10 September 1902, p. 4.
22. Heinrich Gaede, News Report, *Zionsbote*, 16 July 1902, p. 6.
23. Clarence Hiebert, *The Henderson Mennonite Brethren*, p. 97.

### PETER REGIER

1. Obituary, Peter Regier, *Zionsbote*, 10 August 1904, p. 7.
2. Obituary, Katharina Regier (nee Quiring), *Zionsbote*, 3 May 1922, p. 10.
3. *BID*, p. 295.
4. Clarence Hiebert, *The Henderson Mennonite Brethren* (Henderson, Nebraska: Centennial Committee of the Mennonite Brethren Church, 1979), pp. 10-14.
5. John H. Lohrenz, *The Mennonite Brethren Church* (Hillsboro, Kansas: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1950), p. 137.
6. Statistics of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, *Zionsbote*, 18 March 1896, p. 4.
7. Peter Regier, *Kurzgefaste Geschichte der Mennoniten Brueder-Gemeinde*, (Berne, Indiana: Light and Hope Publishing Company, 1901).
8. News Report, *Zionsbote*, 27 July 1904, p. 5.
9. Obituary, Johann J. Regier, *Zionsbote*, 20 August 1902, p. 5.
10. Peter Regier, Report, *Zionsbote*, 8 October 1902, pp. 2, 5.
11. A.E. Neufeld, letter, *Zionsbote*, 3 August 1904, p. 3.
12. *Ibid.*
13. H.W. Lohrenz, Report, *Zionsbote*, 20 July 1904, p. 7.
14. *Ibid.*
15. News Report, *Zionsbote*, 26 April 1922, p. 9.

### JAKOB L. LOEWEN

1. Obituary, Jakob L. Loewen, *Zionsbote*, 18 February 1931, p. 12 is used as a source throughout. One error in this obituary is that Hirschau is listed as his place of birth, an impossibility, since Hirschau was not yet established in 1842.
2. Report, *UB*, January 1852, Vol. 7, No. 1.
3. Clarence Hiebert, *Brothers in Deed*, p. 159.
4. Obituary, Mrs. Jakob L. Loewen (nee Helena Unruh), *Zionsbote*, 10 April 1910, p. 6.

## CHAPTER VI

1. *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, "Hierschau" by David H. Epp.
2. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 8 January 1902, p. 2.
3. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 30 January 1901, p. 2. The four were Tobias Sperling, Peter Boldt, Widow Philipp Warkentin (previously Mrs. Franz Thiessen) and Mrs. Isaak Baerg (formerly Mrs. Aron Fast).
4. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 8 January 1902, p. 2.
5. Gerhard Wiens, "Village Nicknames Among the Mennonites in Russia," *Mennonite Life* 25 (October 1970): 177-180.
6. Maria Wall and Katharina Huebert, personal interviews. The variation in names is demonstrated by Gerhard Wiens, who lists the name for Hierschau as Kosefelt (goat field), a label definitely not acknowledged by the Hierschauer.
7. Gerhard Dyck, personal interview.
8. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
9. Maria Wall, personal interview.
10. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
11. Heinrich Braun and Katharina Huebert, personal interviews.
12. News Report *MR*, 6 October 1926, p. 10.
13. Johann Willms, personal interview.
14. Susanna Friesen, Heinrich Braun, Katharina Huebert and Johann Willms, personal interviews.
15. Information about the choir members was obtained from Susanna Friesen and Katharina Huebert.
16. News Report, *FRS*, 18 May 1913, p. 5.
17. News Report, *MR*, 24 March 1886, pp. 1-2.
18. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 12 August 1903, p. 5.
19. Specific source of this story will not be disclosed, but was related to the author by a reliable witness who had very specific information.
20. Johann Willms, Maria Wall, Katharina Huebert, personal interviews.
21. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 8 January 1902, p. 2.
22. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 29 June 1904, p. 5.
23. Information on this map was derived mainly from Maria Wall and Katharina Huebert, but also supplemented by Susanna Friesen and D.J. Duerksen.
24. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 30 January 1901, p. 2.
25. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter, also Heinrich Braun and Johann Willms, personal interviews.
26. Peter and Susanna Friesen, personal interviews.
27. Susanna Friesen, personal interview.
28. Maria Wall, personal interview, D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
29. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
30. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 24 June 1904, p. 5, also Maria Wall, personal interview.
31. Ken Wall, personal letter.
32. Maria Wall, Johann Willms, Katharina Huebert, personal interviews.
33. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.

## GERTRUDE WILLMS

1. Plett Family History, compiled by Johann Plett and Gerhard Hildebrandt.
2. Maria Wall, second oldest daughter of Gertrude, personal interview.
3. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 29 June 1904, p. 5.
4. Katharina Huebert, second youngest daughter of Gertrude, personal interview.
5. D. J. Duerksen, personal letter.

## CHAPTER VII

1. Report, *UB*, October 1852, p. 8.
2. David Rempel, pp. 242-243, lists the typical Mennonite farm in 1888 as:
 

House and garden	2 dessiatines
Tree plantation	0.8 dess.
Meadows	3 dess.
Pasture	14 dess.
Arable land	45 dess.
3. Gerhard Lohrenz, *Heritage Remembered* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: CBMC Publications, 1974), p. 49.
4. Katharina Huebert, a daughter in the Willms home, personal interview, used throughout the description.
5. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 29 June 1904, p. 5.
6. According to D.J. Duerksen there were three types of fences in Hierschau. There were substantial brick fences, about 1½ feet thick by 3 feet high with an impressive gate. These were the most common. There were board fences, such as the Willms had, and picket fences. Johann Willms, having upgraded the house, had plans to install the first wrought-iron fence in Hierschau.
7. Maria Wall and Johann Willms, personal interviews.
8. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
9. Franz Isaak, pp. 72-73.
10. Rempel, pp. 242-243.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-261.
12. Maria Wall, Johann Willms, Susanna Friesen, Katharina Huebert, personal interviews.
13. Henry B. Tiessen, *The Molotschna Colony* (Kitchener, Canada: 1979), pp. 16-17.
14. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
15. Tiessen, pp. 20-21.
16. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 8 January 1902, p. 2.
17. P. and A. Warkentin, letter, *MR*, 30 April 1913, p. 9.
18. Rempel, p. 244. In 1888 Heinrich Ratzlaff of Gnadenfeld grew 1½ dessiatine winter wheat, but 17½ dessiatine of spring wheat. There was, likely, considerable variation from village to village and also from farmer to farmer.
19. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter; Johann Willms, personal interview.
20. Maria Wall, Johann Willms, Katharina Huebert, Susanna Friesen, personal interviews.
21. Rempel, p. 257.
22. Johann Willms, personal interview.
23. News Report, *FRS*, 18 October 1908, pp. 7-8.
24. Johann Willms, personal interview.
25. James Urry, p. 175.
26. Rempel, p. 273.
27. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
28. *FRS*, 18 September 1913, p. 6.
29. Johann Willms, Katharina Huebert, personal interviews.
30. Advertising, *FRS*, 1 January 1914, p. 15.
31. Advertising, *FRS*, 11 January 1914, p. 11.
32. Advertising, *FRS*, 1 January 1914, p. 16.
33. Advertising, *FRS*, 5 July 1914, p. 15.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Advertising, *FRS*, 19 March 1914, p. 11.
36. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 13 August 1902, p. 4.
37. Johann Willms, personal interview.
38. Rempel, pp. 249-253.

39. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
40. Rempel, p. 264.
41. Peter Mierau, at that time living in Waldheim, helped Jakob Hildebrandt of Hierschau thresh in this way in 1930.
42. Johann Willms, personal interview.
43. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
44. Monatlicher Haus-, Land-, und Vieh-Wirtschafts-Kalendar, *UB*, April 1846, pp. 6-8. Similar reports were published each following month until the whole year was covered.
45. Report by Jakob Toews, *FRS*, 27 February 1910, p. 7.
46. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 17 July 1901, p. 2.
47. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 13 August 1902, p. 3.
48. Report from Hierschau, *MR*, 24 March 1886, p. 2.
49. P. Warkentin, letter, *MR*, 21 August 1912, pp. 15-16.
50. P. and A. Warkentin, letter, *MR*, 17 July 1912, p. 14.
51. There were floods in Halbstadt in 1893, 1909 and 1912. In 1912 cellars were flooded, one house collapsed and not even the mail was delivered (*FRS*, 29 February 1912, p. 9). A report from Waldheim at the same time reports flood waters spilling over the dykes, with considerable damage to orchards (*FRS*, 7 March 1912, p. 4). Hierschau, just downstream from Waldheim, will undoubtedly have been flooded as well.
52. Rempel, pp. 291-292.
53. *MR*, 15 February 1883, p. 2.
54. A. Klaus, *Unsere Kolonien* (1887), pp. 229-230.
55. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 9 November 1904, p. 4.
56. M. Huebert, letter, *MR*, 27 September 1905, p. 10.
57. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
58. Maria Wall, personal interview.
59. Heinrich Braun, Johann Willms, personal interviews.
60. Johann Willms, personal interview. Flinga is a variety of fish commonly sold in that area.
61. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 13 August 1902, p. 4.
62. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
63. Heinrich Braun, Maria Wall, Katharina Huebert, personal interviews; D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
64. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
65. Heinrich Braun, Katharina Huebert, personal interviews; Jakob J. Willms, personal letter.
66. Ken Wall, personal letter.

## CHAPTER VIII

1. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, "Margenau-Alexanderwohl-Landskrone Mennonite Church," by Cornelius Krahn.
2. *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, "Margenau."
3. Gerhard Hildebrandt, "Lebenslauf von Aeltester Gerhard Plett," published in *Mennonitische Maertyrer*, edited by A.A. Toews (A.A. Toews, 1949), Volume 1, pp. 214-219.
4. Peter and Anna Warkentin, letter, *MR*, 11 April 1906, p. 9, 10.
5. Maria Wall and Katharina Huebert, personal interviews, and D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
6. Peter Warkentin, letter, *MR*, 10 April 1912, p. 10.
7. J.A. Toews, p. 71.
8. H. Goerz, p. 135.
9. Report from Russia, *Zionsbote*, 17 July 1912, p. 4.

10. Maria Wall, personal interview.
11. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
12. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter, and Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
13. Ibid.
14. Peter and Susanna Friesen, personal interview.
15. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
16. Anna Unruh, personal letter.
17. Peter and Anna Warkentin, letter, *MR*, 24 August 1910, p. 12.
18. Report, *FRS*, 17 February 1907, p. 82.
19. Report, *FRS*, 19 January 1908, p. 42, also 18 October 1908, p. 9.
20. Report, *FRS*, 28 April 1910, p. 9.
21. Maria Wall, personal interview.
22. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 8 January 1902, p. 2.
23. News Report, *MR*, 19 March 1890, p. 1.
24. News Report, *FRS*, 10 July 1910, p. 8.
25. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
26. Toews, pp. 113-115.
27. D.M. Hofer and Barbara Hofer, Report, *MR*, 16 May 1923, p. 11.
28. D.M. Hofer, *Die Hungersnot in Russland und Unsere Reise um die Welt* (Chicago, Illinois: K.M.B. Publishing House, 1924), pp. 70-72.
29. Jakob J. Willms, personal letter.
30. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
31. Gerhard Plett, ". . . Und wenn uns je will grauen, so bleibt's: Der Herr is treu" in D.M. Hofer, pp. 157-159.
32. K. Fast, Report, *Unser Blatt*, June 1928, pp. 201-202.
33. Gerhard Hildebrandt, "Lebenslauf von Aeltester Gerhard Plett," p. 218.
34. H.T. Huebert, personal observation, July 1982.
35. William Neufeld, personal interview.
36. A.A. Toews, *Mennonitische Maertyrer* (A.A. Toews, 1949), Volume 1, pp. 189-190.
37. Victor Koehn, personal interview.

## GERHARD PLETT

1. Plett Family History.
2. Gerhard Hildebrandt, "Lebenslauf von Aeltester Gerhard Plett" (supplemented by the editor), in *Mennonitische Maertyrer*, edited by A.A. Toews (A.A. Toews, 1949), Volume 1, pp. 214-219, used throughout this biography.
3. Gerhard Hildebrandt says September 27, 1890, the Plett Family History says December 27. I will assume a more appropriate period of mourning and allow a seven month gap between the death of Gerhard's first wife and his re-marriage.
4. Peter and Anna Warkentin, letter, *MR*, 19 August 1908, p. 9.
5. Peter and Anna Warkentin, letter, *MR*, 26 March 1902, p. 9.
6. Abraham Siemens, letter, *MR*, 9 September 1903, p. 4.
7. Peter and Anna Warkentin, letter, *MR*, 28 December 1910, p. 11.
8. Report, *FRS*, 11 September 1910, p. 9.
9. K. Fast, News Report, *Unser Blatt*, June 1928, p. 201.
10. Report, *FRS*, 30 July 1914, p. 5.
11. Gerhard Hildebrandt reports that this incident occurred in 1919, but the Wall family history is quite specific as to its occurring to the newly married Aron Wall. Aron married Maria Braun in Hierschau on September 4, 1921 with Aeltester Plett officiating. The Walls came back to Hierschau to visit Maria's mother in January, 1922.

12. Gerhard P. Schroeder, *Miracles of Grace and Judgment* (Published by the author, 1974), pp. 194-198 describes a similar imprisonment of a group of men in the town of Belenkojeat at roughly the same time, again for no specific known reason.
13. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
14. Gerhard Plett, letter, *MR*, 9 August 1922, pp. 11, 12, supplement.
15. Gerhard Plett, "... Und wenn uns je will grauen, so bleibt's: 'Der Herr ist Treu' " in a book written and edited by D.M. Hofer, *Die Hungersnot in Russland und Unsere Reise um die Welt* (Chicago: K.M.B. Publishing House, 1924), pp. 157-159.
16. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
17. K. Fast, News Report, *Unser Blatt*, June 1928, pp. 201-202.

## CHAPTER IX

1. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter
2. Peter Harms, letter, *MR*, 19 March 1881, p. 1.
3. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 8 January 1902, p. 2.
4. Correspondent from the Molotschna, letter, *MR*, 29 January 1902, p. 2.
5. News Report, *FRS*, 23 January 1910, p. 9.
6. According to the map of Hippenmaeyer, drawn in 1852, which appears in the back of Franz Isaac, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten* (Halbstadt: H.J. Braun, 1908).
7. P.M. Friesen, pp. 576-577.
8. P.F. Froese, reporting on a trip made by M.C.C. workers February 19 to March 19, 1922 in southern Russia, *MR*, 19 July 1922, p. 3.
9. During the better times, this was the complement of horses on the Johann Willms Wirtschaft in Hierschau.
10. Friesen, pp. 576-577.
11. Gerhard Lorenz, *Heritage Remembered* (Winnipeg: C.M.B.C. Publications, 1974), p. 194.
12. Advertising in *FRS*, 13 May 1906, p. 199.
13. H. Goerz, pp. 177-178, quoting C.D. Bondar.
14. Advertising in *FRS*, 30 May 1909, p. 12.
15. Advertising in *FRS*, 10 October 1902, p. 18.
16. Advertising in *FRS*, 15 June 1913, pp. 14, 15.
17. Advertising in *FRS*, 1 January 1914, p. 14.
18. Advertising in *FRS*, 4 January 1914, p. 16.
19. Advertising in *FRS*, 15 January 1914, p. 12.
20. Goerz, pp. 177-178, quoting C.D. Bondar.
21. William I. Neufeld, Maria Wall, personal interviews.
22. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
23. *FRS*, 7 September 1913, p. 5.
24. Jacob Neumann, letter, *MR*, 3 July 1912, pp. 14-15.
25. News Report, *FRS*, 26 July 1908, p. 475.
26. P.F. Froese, *MR*, 19 July 1922, p. 3.
27. H.T. Huebert, *Kornelius Martens: Our Skillful Advocate* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 1986), p. 13.
28. Goerz, p. 181.
29. Maria Wall, step-daughter of Johann Willms, personal interview.
30. News Report, *FRS*, 12 June 1910, p. 8.
31. News Report, *FRS*, 1 December 1912, p. 8.
32. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
33. News Report, *FRS*, 22 May 1913, p. 6.
34. Katharina Peters, personal interview.

35. News Report, *FRS*, 31 July 1913, p. 6.
36. News Report, *FRS*, 17 July 1913, p. 7.
37. Report listing all train schedules, Trains No. 3, 5, 4 and 6 are listed in *FRS*, 21 December 1913, p. 6.
38. Report, *Der Herold*, 21 October 1926, p. 6.
39. News Report, *FRS*, 26 February 1914, p. 5.
40. News Report, *FRS*, 29 January 1914, p. 7.
41. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
42. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter, Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
43. Victor Toews, personal interview.
44. Elisabeth Huebert, Maria Klassen, Margaret Kleiwer, personal interviews.
45. Subscriber List, *UB* January 1851, p. 2.
46. Subscriber List, *MR*, 2 January 1884, p. 2.
47. *MR*, 20 September 1899, p. 1.
48. J.B. Toews, "Voice of Peace in Troubled Times," *Mennonite Life* (September 1972), 93-94.
49. *FRS*, 1 November 1914, p. 3.
50. Report from Konteniusfeld, *FRS*, 28 November 1909, p. 8.
51. Johann H. Bekker, son of Hermann Bekker, letter, *MR*, 18 July 1923, p. 9.
52. *FRS*, 14 November 1912, p. 8.
53. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 2 July 1902, p. 5.
54. *FRS*, 28 November 1909, p. 8.
55. Report, *FRS*, 30 June 1910, p. 8.
56. Maria Wall, Johann Willms, Katharina Huebert, personal interviews.
57. Isaak Neufeld, Report, *FRS*, 4 June 1911, p. 8.

## HEINRICH J. THIESSEN

1. Family History, Emil A. Thiessen.
2. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 10 October 1900, pp. 2, 4.
3. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 13 March 1901, p. 2.
4. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 3 April 1901, p. 6.
5. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 17 July 1901, p. 2.
6. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 18 May 1904, p. 5.
7. Muntau Hospital report for 1902, sent in by H. J. Thiessen, *MR*, 6 May 1903, p. 9.
8. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 29 June 1904, p. 5.
9. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 3 April 1901, p. 6.
10. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 13 July 1904, p. 4.
11. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 9 November 1904, pp. 4-5.
12. Johann Abrahams, letter, *MR*, 26 April 1905, p. 6.
13. Bernhard Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 24 May 1905, pp. 2-3.
14. Abr. Harms, letter, *MR*, 21 June 1905, pp. 2-3.
15. Johann Abrahams, letter, *MR*, 26 April 1905, pp. 4-5.

## CHAPTER X

1. H. Goerz, p. 91.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
3. David H. Epp, *Johann Cornies* (Rosthern, Saskatchewan: Echo-Verlag, 1946), pp. 58-68.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-71.
5. James Urry, pp. 354-358.

6. Goerz, p. 101. Goerz mentions age of compulsory attendance of school as 6-14 years, most other sources mention 7-14.
7. *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, "Hierschau" by David H. Epp.
8. John Goerz, personal letter.
9. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
10. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
11. Katharina Rempel, personal interview, confirmed by David Rempel, p. 303.
12. Katharina Peters, personal interview. The Landskrone Fortbildungsschule was likely started about 1918 and continued until at least 1925. Two Hierschau boys attended 1924-25.
13. Victor Koehn, personal interview.
14. Frieda Giesbrecht, personal letter.
15. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
16. Goerz, pp. 152-153.
17. *FRS*, 22 February 1914, p. 5.
18. *FRS*, 2 April 1914, p. 5.
19. Maria Wall and Johann Willms, personal interviews.
20. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
21. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
22. Maria Wall, personal interview.
23. Goerz, pp. 153-154.
24. *FRS*, 29 January 1914, p. 6.
25. Goerz, p. 154.
26. Report from Russia, *MR*, 9 January 1924, p. 9.
27. Goerz, pp. 172-174.
28. *Ibid*, p. 162.
29. News Report, *MR*, 20 November 1907, p. 6.
30. *Der Herald*, 21 October 1926, p. 6.
31. H.T. Huebert, *Kornelius Martens: Our Skillful Advocate* (Winnipeg: Springfield Publishers, 1986), p. 4.
32. *FRS*, 22 February 1914, p. 5.
33. Molotschna Report, *UB*, 1857, Beilage, p. 26.
34. Abraham Siemens, letter, *MR*, 9 September 1903, p. 4. The *UB* report names the teacher Jakob Huebert. I am hoping that the Hiebert of the *MR* letter is the more accurate spelling, since it is written by his own grandchildren, though in the spelling of names this is no certain guarantee.
35. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 10 October 1900, pp. 2, 4.
36. D.J. Duerksen, son of Jakob Duerksen, personal letters, also obituary of daughter, Elisabeth Funk (nee Duerksen), *MR*, 24 November 1971, p. 11.
37. Plett Family History.
38. Katharina Peters, daughter of Isaak Peters, unpublished biography.
39. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
40. Goerz, pp. 172-174.
41. Maria Wall, personal interview.
42. Gertrude Baerg, personal interview.
43. Maria Wall, personal interview.
44. Gertrude Baerg, personal interview.
45. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
46. John Goerz, son of Johann A. Goerz, personal letter.
47. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
48. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
49. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
50. List of Immigrants, *Der Bote*, 12 January 1927, p. 4.
51. Obituary of Franz Johann Willms, *MR*, 16 February 1955, pp. 1, 4.
52. Molotschna Report, *UB*, May 1950, p. 38.
53. David Rempel, p. 303. Rempel counts four girls' schools, but according to



advertising in *FRS*, there were at least five, in Halbstadt, Gnadenfeld, Ohrloff, New York and Karassan.

54. Advertising, *FRS*, 1 August 1909, p. 11.
55. Advertising, *FRS*, 6 August 1914, pp. 5, 10, 11.
56. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
57. Katharina Peters, personal interview.
58. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.

### ISAAK F. PETERS

1. Katharina Peters, daughter, unpublished biography and personal interviews used throughout. Isaak's date of birth according to the Julian calendar was November 30, therefore December 12 according to the Gregorian.
2. Obituary of Isaak F. Peters, *MR*, 5 December 1951, p. 6.
3. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 29 June 1904, p. 5.
4. H.J. Thiessen states that Jakob Duerksen was still Schulze in 1904; D.J. Duerksen, in a personal letter, says that Jakob Duerksen was elected Oberschulze in 1905, so it is likely that Isaak Peters replaced him as Schulze at that time.

### JOHANN A. GOERZ

1. John Goerz, son of Johann Goerz, personal letters, used as information throughout.
2. *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, "Abraham Goerz" by A. Braun, as well as a number of references in P.M. Friesen.
3. Obituary of Johann A. Goerz, *MR*, 5 June 1957, p. 11.
4. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
5. Ibid.
6. D.M. Hofer, p. 71.
7. Johann A. Goerz, written 6 June 1923 as contribution to D.M. Hofer, pp. 165-166.
8. Report of Immigrants, *MR*, 20 January 1926, p. 15.
9. J.A. Toews, p. 261.
10. J.H. Quiring, student at Dalmeny in 1928, personal interview.
11. Toews, p. 263.
12. Obituary of Heinrich Goerz, *Zionsbote*, 21 June 1950, pp. 12-13.

### CHAPTER XI

1. *UB*, January 1858, p. 3.
2. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 1 January 1903, p. 12.
3. D.J. Duerksen, son of Jakob G. Duerksen, personal letter.
4. Katharina Peters, daughter of Isaak F. Peters, personal letter.
5. Michael Duerksen, letter, *MR*, 14 September 1910, p. 5.
6. Kornelius Siemens, letter sent in to newspaper as Dorfvorsteher, *FRS*, 19 October 1913, p. 6.

7. Maria Wall, Heinrich Braun, personal interviews; D.J. Duerksen and Jakob J. Willms, personal letters.
8. Maria Wall, personal interview.
9. Ibid.
10. Dorfkarte of Hierschau, dated January 29, 1942, prepared under the auspices of the occupying German forces.
11. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 1 January 1903, p. 12.
12. Heinrich and Susanna Nikkel, letter, *MR*, 19 November 1902, p. 3.
13. D.J. Duerksen, personal letter.
14. Michael Duerksen, letter, *MR*, 14 September 1910, p. 5.
15. Jakob J. Willms, son of Schulze Jakob Willms, personal letter.
16. *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, "Taurida" by Kornelius Krahn.
17. *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, "Hierschau" by David H. Epp.
18. H. Goerz, pp. 123-124.
19. *MR*, 19 March 1881, p. 2.
20. David Rempel, p. 210, Lawrence Klippenstein, pp. 153-154.
21. *MR*, 7 January 1885, p. 2.
22. *MR*, 15 September 1882, p. 2.
23. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 1 April 1903, p. 5.
24. Report, *FRS*, 18 October 1908, p. 4.
25. *MR*, 24 June 1908, p. 9.
26. Goerz, pp. 124-126.
27. J.N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour: Russian History 1812-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 108-109.
28. P.M. Friesen, p. 584.
29. Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia 1789-1935" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1984), pp. 75-77.
30. Friesen, pp. 585-586.
31. H. Friesen, report, *MR*, 8 March 1905, p. 9.
32. M. Huebert, letter, *MR*, 27 September 1905, p. 5.
33. M. Huebert, letter, *MR*, 8 March 1905, p. 10.
34. Westwood, pp. 139-143.
35. Ibid., pp. 145-146.
36. *FRS*, 29 April 1906, p. 73.
37. *FRS*, 24 June 1906, p. 264.
38. *FRS*, 12 August 1906, pp. 348-349.
39. *FRS*, 24 June 1906, p. 267.
40. *FRS*, 19 August 1906, p. 362.
41. *FRS*, 23 December 1906, p. 578.
42. *History of Cities and Villages of the Ukrainian S.S.R.*, Zaporizka Oblast (Kiev: Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1970), p. 700.
43. *FRS*, 27 May 1906, p. 220.
44. *FRS*, 29 April 1906, pp. 172-174.
45. *FRS*, 27 May 1906, p. 218.
46. Westwood, pp. 164-165.
47. *FRS*, 20 January 1907, p. 32.
48. *MR*, 16 October 1907, p. 8.
49. Westwood, pp. 166-167.
50. David Dueck, Report, *FRS*, 7 November 1909, p. 7.

#### JAKOB G. DUERKSEN

1. D.J. Duerksen, youngest child of Jakob Duerksen, personal letters, used throughout this biography.

2. David Dueck, Report, *FRS*, 7 November 1909, p. 7. Gerhard Duerksen, brother of Jakob, was one of 28 representatives of the Berdiansk area to be granted an audience by the Czar. The Czar asked Gerhard how long he had lived in Russia, whereupon he replied that his father had emigrated in 1828.
3. Duerksen Family History
4. H. Goerz, p. 183 lists Gerhard Duerksen as Oberschulze from 1887 to 1904. A crop report from the Gnadenfeld Wolost from late in 1904, however, still was sent to the *MR* by Gerhard Duerksen (*MR*, 14 December 1904, p. 8).
5. P.M. Friesen, p. 498 and J.A. Toews, pp. 83, 89-90.
6. David Jakob Duerksen, Obituary, *Der Bote*, 23 November 1983, p. 7.
7. Elisabeth Funk (nee Duerksen), Obituary, *MR*, 24 November 1971, p. 11.
8. H.J. Thiessen, letter, *MR*, 8 January 1902, p. 2 and also 29 June 1904, p. 5.
9. Katharina Peters, unpublished biography of Isaak Peters.
10. *FRS*, 10 September 1911, p. 8.
11. *FRS*, 18 August 1910, p. 7.
12. *FRS*, 30 July 1914, p. 5.

## CHAPTER XII

1. Sources for "Russia and World War I" include:
  - J.N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour, Russian History 1812-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).
  - A.J.P. Taylor, *The First World War* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963).
  - Clarence A. Manning, *The Story of the Ukraine* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947).
  - Story of the Czar's Abdication, *MR*, 8 August 1917, pp. 13-14.
  - Various encyclopaedias.
2. *FRS*, 30 July 1914, p. 5.
3. Adolf Ehrh, *Das Mennonitentum in Russland* (Berlin-Leipzig: Julius Beltz, 1932), p. 112.
4. Report on the Forstei Service, *Molotschnaer Flugblatt*, 9 September 1917, p. 1.
5. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
6. Plett Family History
7. *FRS*, 9 August 1914, p. 6.
8. *FRS*, 27 August 1914, p. 5.
9. *FRS*, 3 September 1914, p. 5.
10. *MR*, 18 November 1914, p. 13.
11. *FRS*, 8 October 1914, p. 3.
12. *FRS*, 29 October 1914, p. 5.
13. Ehrh, p. 112.
14. Abraham Kroeker, letter, *MR*, 1 December 1915, p. 7.
15. Ehrh, p. 113.
16. *FRS*, 13 September 1914, p. 5.
17. Abraham Kroeker, letter, *MR*, 21 April 1915, p. 7.
18. *FRS*, 13 September 1914, p. 5.
19. *MR*, 18 November 1914, p. 12.
20. Abraham Kroeker, letter, *MR*, 21 April 1915, p. 7.
21. H. Goerz, p. 189.
22. Heinrich Neumann, letter, *MR*, 26 May 1915, p. 9.
23. Abraham Kroeker, letter, *MR*, 1 December 1915, p. 7.
24. Premarno is the name of Hierschau in an official document signed by village Elder Duerksen on June 21, 1916.
25. H. Goerz, p. 189.

26. Abraham Kroeker, letter, *MR*, 1 December 1915, p. 7.
27. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
28. Abraham Kroeker, letter, *MR*, 11 July 1917, p. 3.
29. H. Unruh, letter, *MR*, 11 July 1917, p. 10.
30. News Report, *MR*, 15 August 1917, p. 14.
31. *History of Cities and Villages of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic* (Kiev: Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR, 1970), p. 700.
32. J.B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982), pp. 79-80.
33. Clarence A. Manning, *The Story of the Ukraine* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), pp. 216-233.
34. *Volksfreund*, 23 April 1918, p. 7.
35. *Volksfreund*, 20 April 1918, p. 1.
36. Ibid.
37. *Volksfreund*, 31 May 1918, p. 7.
38. J.B. Toews, pp. 81-83.
39. *Volksfreund*, 31 May 1918, p. 7.
40. J.B. Toews, *The Mennonites in Russia, 1917-1930, Selected Documents* (Winnipeg: 1975), pp. 404-416.
41. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
42. Heinrich Braun, personal interview. It should be remembered that in 1918 the term "Fuehrer" did not have the historical connotations it now has. Hitler had not yet risen to power.

## CHAPTER XIII

1. Sources used to compile the Hierschau Chronology of Events:
  - Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
  - Adolf Ehrh, *Das Mennonitentum in Russland* (Berlin-Leipzig: Julius Beltz, 1932).
  - Peter Epp, personal interview.
  - H. Goertz, *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung* (Steinbach, Manitoba: Echo-Verlag, 1950/51).
  - Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia. 1789-1935" (Ph.D dissertation).
  - J.B. Toews, *Lost Fatherland* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1967).
  - J.B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982).
  - P.N. Wrangel, *The Memoirs of General Wrangel. The Last Commander-in-Chief of the Russian National Army* (New York: Duffield, 1930).
2. Heinrich Braun, personal interview, used as information throughout discussion of Selbstschutz.
3. Maria Wall, personal interview.
4. J.B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982), p. 90, quoting Goossen, *Vaterlandsliebe*. Kornelius Martens of Gnadenfeld was one of the Mennonite representatives who met with General Dobenko.
5. Maria Wall, personal interview.
6. Plett Family History and Sarah Doell, personal interview.
7. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
8. Maria Wall, personal interview.
9. Wrangel, pp. 104-105.
10. Ibid., pp. 112-115.

11. Peter Epp, personal interview.
12. Heinrich Braun and Maria Wall, personal interviews.
13. Heinrich Braun, personal interview.
14. Heinrich Braun and Maria Wall, personal interviews.
15. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
16. Johann Willms and Katharina Huebert, personal interviews.
17. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
18. Maria Wall, personal interview.
19. Gerhard Hildebrandt, "Lebenslauf von Aeltester Gerhard Plett" (supplemented by the editor) in *Mennonitische Maertyrer*, edited by A.A. Towes (published by A.A. Towes, 1949). vol. 1, pp. 214-219.

### HEINRICH BRAUN

1. Heinrich Braun, personal interview, used extensively throughout most of this biography.
2. Katharina Huebert, Heinrich's younger sister, personal interview.
3. J.B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982), p. 90.
4. Aaron F. Neufeld, Obituary, *Zionsbote*, 7 February 1940, pp. 11-12.
5. Goertzen Family History and Mrs. Peter K. Goertzen (wife of Peter Goertzen), personal letter.
6. Birth Certificate of Heinrich Braun provided by the North Kildonan Mennonite Brethren Church in 1965 mentions Rev. J. Abrams of Nebraska, U.S.A. as the minister who baptized him.
7. Heinrich Braun, Obituary, *MR*, 29 June 1983, p. 27.

### CHAPTER XIV

1. Report, *MR*, 25 June 1924, pp. 12-13.
2. *MR*, 16 May 1923, pp. 2, 8.
3. Jakob and Elisabeth Koop, letter, *MR*, 28 June 1922, p. 14.
4. D.M. and Barbara Hofer, Report from Halbstadt December 1, 1922, *MR*, 31 January 1923, p. 10-11.
5. B.B. Janz, letter written to Mennonite Relief Agency, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, dated July 25, 1921.
6. H. Goossen, Report, *MR*, 26 July 1922, p. 1.
7. Jakob J. Willms, personal letter.
8. Johann Willms, personal interview.
9. Heinrich A. Bartsch, Report, *MR*, 9 January 1924, pp. 9-10.
10. Report of a general meeting of Mennonites held in Landskrone in June 1922, *MR*, 18 October 1922, p. 10.
11. D.M. Hofer, *Die Hungersnot in Russland und Unsere Reise um die Welt* (Chicago, Illinois: K.M.B. Publishing House, 1924), p. 26.
12. P.C. Hiebert and Orie O. Miller, *Feeding the Hungry, Russia Famine 1919-1925* (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Mennonite Central Committee, 1929), p. 213.
13. *MR*, listed requests for food drafts in almost every issue in mid-1922. Hierschau people are included in the lists on 19 April, 2 August, 9 August, 16 August, 23 August and 30 August.

14. Hiebert and Miller, *Ibid.*, pp. 49-57. See also Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *From the Files of MCC* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1980), pp. 9-26.
15. *Ibid.*
16. D.M. Hofer, pp. 12, 78. Clayton Kratz disappeared during his M.C.C. service in the Soviet Union, likely having been executed by a bandit group.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-25.
18. *Ibid.*, Report by Kornelius Loewen, p. 251.
19. Margaret Loewen, daughter of Kornelius Loewen, personal interview, also D.M. Hofer, p. 251.
20. Jakob Janzen, Report, *MR*, 28 June 1922, p. 5.
21. M.C.C. Report, *MR*, 16 May 1923, p. 1.
22. Vernon Smucker, Report, *MR*, 17 May 1922, p. 4.
23. G.G. Hiebert, American Mennonite Relief Report, *MR*, 22 August 1923, pp. 1, 2, 14.
24. Johann Willms, Maria Wall, personal interviews.
25. G.G. Hiebert, A.M.R. Report.
26. A letter written to David Hofer and his wife, as representatives of the American Mennonite Relief, *MR*, 18 April 1923, p. 8.
27. Gerhard Plett, letter, *MR*, 9 August 1922, p. 12, supplement.
28. D.M. Hofer and Barbara Hofer, *MR*, 16 May 1923, p. 11.
29. D.M. Hofer, *Die Hungersnot in Russland*, pp. 70-72.
30. Published by the K.M.B. Publishing House in Chicago, Illinois, in 1924.
31. Hofer, pp. 157-159.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-180.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
39. Now found in the *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde* No. 448. Music and words are by Aron G. Sawatzky.
40. Katharina Huebert, personal interview.
41. Hofer, p. 158.

## CHAPTER XV

1. N. Rempel and A. Bauer in "Report Regarding the Situation of the Refugees in the Gnadenfeld District", July 22, 1924, published by J.B. Toews in *The Mennonites in Russia, 1917-1930 Selected Documents* (Winnipeg, Canada: Christian Press, 1975), pp. 55-57.
2. Sources for Table XXII, List of Families Known to have moved to Hierschau during the period of unrest:
  - Katharina Huebert, Maria Wall, personal interviews.
  - Lists of people requesting food drafts in 1922, appearing in the *MR*, in 1922.
  - Lists of immigrants from Russia to Canada and South America appearing in the *MR* and *Der Bote*.
  - Family Histories.
3. *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, "Hierschau," by D.H. Epp.
4. Report from Russia, *MR*, 9 January 1924, p. 9.
5. Kornelius Martens, "Der alte Gott Eliae lebt noch", published in D.M. Hofer, *Die Hungersnot in Russland und Unsere Reise um die Welt* (Chicago, Illinois: K.M.B. Publishing House, 1924), p. 202.
6. *Der Herold*, 21 October 1926, p. 6.

7. J.B. Toews, *Lost Fatherland* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1967), pp. 53-55.
8. Ibid., p. 58.
9. Ibid., p. 67-68.
10. Ibid., p. 71.
11. Ibid., p. 77.
12. Ibid., pp. 84-85.
13. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus* (Altona, Manitoba: Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, 1962), pp. 101-112.
14. Toews, pp. 136-137.
15. Ibid., pp. 141-142.
16. Ibid., pp. 147-149.
17. Epp, pp. 161-165.
18. Ibid., pp. 252-254.
19. Ibid., pp. 230-239.
20. Ibid., p. 261.
21. Sources for Table XXIII:  
     Frank H. Epp, pp. 239-241, 282.  
     Adolf Ehrt, *Das Mennonitentum in Russland* (Berlin-Leipzig: Julius Beltz, 1932), pp. 158-159.  
     Numbers vary somewhat from source to source, for example the *MR*, 11 August 1926, p. 10, lists the total number of immigrants into Canada in 1925 as 4501, not 3772 as mentioned by Epp and Ehrt.
22. Jakob J. Willms, personal letter.
23. Sources for Table XXIV and XXV:  
     Many personal interviews, letters and family histories.
24. *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, "Hierschau", by D.H. Epp.
25. Information obtained from family histories as well as Immigration lists published in the *MR* and *Der Bote*.
26. Sources used throughout the story are:  
     Maria Wall, Johann Willms, Gertrude Baerg, Katharina Huebert, personal interviews.  
     Aganetha Dyck (Dueck), letter, *Der Herold*, 23 September 1926.  
     Report, *MR*, 22 September 1926, p. 8.  
     Report, *MR*, 6 October 1926, p. 10.  
     Wall-Willms Family History.  
     Ernest Dyck, personal letter and interview.

## CHAPTER XVI

1. J.N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavour: Russian History 1812-1980*, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 294-296.
2. Report from a private letter from the Molotschna, *Der Bote*, 2 May 1928, p. 3.
3. Report about conditions in South Russia, *Der Bote*, 4 July 1928, p. 3.
4. Ibid.
5. Report from Gnadenfeld in the Ukraine, *Der Bote*, 9 May 1928, p. 3.
6. Report, *Der Bote*, 4 July 1928, p. 3.
7. Report, *Der Bote*, 3 January 1929, p. 3.
8. Westwood, pp. 296-297.
9. Ibid., p. 298.
10. *MR*, 11 June 1930, p. 7.
11. Ibid.
12. Gerhard Hildebrandt, "Lebenslauf von Aeltester Gerhard Plett" (supplemented by the Editor) in *Mennonitische Maertyrer*, edited by A.A. Toews (Published by A.A. Toews, 1949), Vol. 1, pp. 217-218.

13. Johann Plett, personal interview.
14. Elisabeth Plett, "Prediger Gerhard Kornelius Plett" in *Mennonitische Martyrer*, edited by A.A. Toews (Published by A.A. Toews, North Clearbrook, B.C., Canada, 1954), Vol. 2, pp. 93-94.
15. Peter and Susanna Friesen, personal interview.
16. Sources for Table XXVII:  
Johann Plett, personal interview  
Family Histories
17. Peter Mierau, personal letter.
18. Victor Koehn, personal interview.
19. Victor Koehn, personal interview.
20. Katharina Rempel, daughter of Heinrich Gaede, personal interview.
21. Ibid.
22. Sources of information about the Creamery:  
Victor Koehn, personal interview.  
Susanna Friesen, personal interview.  
Frieda Giesbrecht, personal letter.  
Margaret Klassen, personal letter.
23. Susanna Friesen, sister of Gerhard Wiebe, personal interview.
24. D.J. Duerksen, brother of Jakob Duerksen, personal letter.
25. Plett Family History and Sarah Doell, sister of Abraham Plett, personal interview.
26. Elisabeth Plett, "Prediger Gerhard Kornelius Plett" in *Mennonitische Martyrer*, edited by A.A. Toews (Published by A.A. Toews, North Clearbrook, B.C., Canada, 1954), Vol. 2, pp. 93-94.
27. Dorfkarten for German villages in the Ukraine prepared in 1941-1942 by SS-personnel working for Sonderkommando R in the German occupied Ukraine.

## CHAPTER XVII

1. Ronald Heiferman, *World War II* (London: Octopus Books Limited, 1973), pp. 28-30.
2. One of the items high on the German list of priorities was, of course, the Jewish problem. The Soviets wanted to assure themselves that the Polish leadership would be weakened, and accomplished this in part by the murder of 14,500 Polish officers at Katyn (see Louis FitzGibbon, *Katyn Massacre* (London, England: Transworld Publishers Ltd., 1977).
3. Heiferman, pp. 33-47.
4. Heinrich Graf von Einsiedel, *The Onslaught: German Drive to Stalingrad* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984), pp. 9-10, 177. Historians vary somewhat in their data. J.N. Westwood mentions 182 German divisions, 3200 tanks. Even the exact time of the initial invasion is not certain, some authors mention 3 A.M., others all the way to 4 A.M. It certainly was early in the morning, and may have varied from sector to sector. Most historians, in their descriptions are lean on hard facts, rich in rhetoric.
5. Peter Sudermann, personal interview.
6. Alexander Werth, *Russia at War* (New York: Carroll and Gaf Publishers, 1964), p. 216.
7. From Dorfkarten for German villages in the Ukraine. These reports were prepared in 1941-1942 by SS personnel working for Sonderkommando R of the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, a branch of the SS with jurisdiction over Germans in occupied territories.
8. Peter and Susanna Friesen, personal interview.



9. Elisabeth Plett, "Prediger Gerhard Kornelius Plett" in *Mennonitische Maertryrer*, edited by A.A. Toews (published by A.A. Toews, North Clearbrook, B.C., Canada, 1954), Vol. 2, pp. 93-94.
10. Margaretha Klassen, personal letter.
11. Heinrich Woelk and Gerhard Woelk, *Die Mennoniten Bruedergemeinde in Russland 1925-1980* (Fresno, California: Board of Christian Literature, 1982), pp. 60-61. Also described in H. Goerz, *Die Molotschnaer Ansiedlung*, pp. 205-207.
12. From Dorfkarten information. It will be noted that Tiege, despite a large number of deported Mennonites, still had 136 remaining. Most of these are likely the refugees from Tschongraw who moved there after the German occupation of the region.
13. Sources of this story: Victor Koehn, Walter Loewen, various Tschongraw refugees, personal interviews.
14. Victor Koehn, personal interview.
15. See report on The Captured German Documents by Ken Reddig, Archivist, Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, Canada.
16. Ibid.
17. Source of this information is known, but will not be revealed at the request of the informant.
18. Dorfkarten are at the Mennonite Brethren Archives, Winnipeg, Canada.
19. Margaretha Klassen, personal letter.
20. Frieda Giesbrecht (nee Willms), personal letter.
21. Peter and Susanna Friesen, personal interview.
22. Margaretha Klassen, personal letter.
23. Jakob J. Wiens, "Das Dorf Tschongraw" in *Die Krim war unsere Heimat* (Winnipeg, Canada: Published by Martin Durksen, 1977), pp. 83-88.
24. Anna Janzen, "Etwas aus unserem Leben, seit wir unsere liebe Heimat 1941 verlassen mussten," in *Die Krim war unsere Heimat*, pp. 286-322.
25. Sources used throughout the story include personal interviews of many Crimean Gypsies:  
Anni Koop, Maria Klassen, Elisabeth Huebert, Margaret Kliewer, Bertha Toews, Elvira Loewen, Katharina (Tina) Klassen, Louise Toews. Fifteen of this group are now members of the Portage Avenue Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg.

## CHAPTER XVIII

1. Heinrich, Graf von Einsiedel, *The Onslaught: German Drive to Stalingrad* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1984), p. 181.
2. Sources used throughout the story of the Great Trek:  
J. Neufeld, "Die Flucht, 1943-46," *Der Mennonite*, March 1951, pp. 38-39, 42, April 1951, pp. 58-60.  
Tina Bartsch, personal letter.  
Johann Plett, personal interview.  
Jacob A. Neufeld, *Tiefenwege* (Virgil, Ontario: Niagara Press), pp. 101-208.
3. Tina Bartsch, personal letter.
4. Sources for Table XXXIII:  
Tina Bartsch (originally Tina Pauls, nee Sukkau), personal letter.  
Johann Plett, personal interview.  
Margaretha Klassen (nee Neufeld), personal letter.  
This list is undoubtedly quite incomplete, since it is probable that the entire German population of 175 as well as some others joined in the Great Trek.
5. Victor Koehn, personal interview.

6. Tina Bartsch, personal letter.
7. Many of the refugees consider this complicity to have been an Allied war crime. Concessions the Allies gave Stalin at the Yalta Conference in February, 1945, probably cost thousands of Mennonite lives.
8. George K. Epp, "Die Flucht der Russlaender," *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch 1985* (Karlsruhe, West Germany: Heinrich Schneider KG, 1985), pp. 69-74.
9. Frieda Giesbrecht, personal interview.

## CHAPTER XIX

1. Much of the data and description in this chapter comes as the result of a visit by the author to Hierschau on July 22, 1982. The village was inspected and a number of current occupants interviewed on a beautiful, though quite warm afternoon. Current photographs were taken by the author on that visit.
2. Anna Epp Ens, *The House of Heinrich* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Epp Book Committee, 1980), p. 27. This name was confirmed by the author during his visit.
3. *History of Cities and Villages of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic* (Kiev: Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, 1970), Zaporozhe Province, p. 679.
4. At least that is how they did it at the Karl Marx Collective Farm, centred at Gnadenfeld, just south of the Gorki Collective Farm. Source: Walter Loewen, personal interview.

## WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

### LINEAR MEASUREMENTS

1 Vershok	1/16 Arshin	1.7 Inches	4.4cm
1 Arshin	16 Vershok	28.0 Inches	71.12 cm
1 Sazhen	3 Arshin	7.0 Feet	213.36 cm
	(Faden or Fathom)		
1 Werst	500 Sazhen	.663 Miles	1.0668 km
	(Fathoms)		

### LAND AREA

1 Dessiatine	2400 Square Sazhen or Fathoms	2.7 Acres	1.0925 Hectares
1 Morgen (Prussian)	.234 Dessiatines	.631 Acres	.255 Hectares

### WEIGHTS

1 Zolotnik	1/96 Funt	.33 ozs.	4.26 Grams
1 Funt	96 Zolotnik	12.0 ozs.	409.5 Grams
	(Russian Pound)		
1 Pood	40 Funts	36.11 lbs.	16.38 kg
	(Pud)		

### DRY MEASURES (MOSTLY GRAINS)

1 Chetverik	1/8 Chetvert	.75 Bushels (U.S.)	26.24 Litres
1 Chetvert	8 Chetverik	5.96 Bushels (U.S.)	209.92 Litres
	8 Poods		
1 Fuder	1 Ladder wagon full		

### MONETARY

1 Ruble	100 Kopecks	Value in Canadian and U.S. currency has varied from time to time
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Specific values of weights and measures used in Russia have varied from time to time. Some eventually were standardized by Imperial decree and thereafter remained unchanged. The values quoted in this table are those which were, according to our best information, in common use in Russia during the time the Mennonites lived there. In 1918 all weights and measures in the Soviet Union were changed to the metric system.

## DATES AND CALENDARS

No attempt has been made in this book to differentiate or correct dates as to the Julian (Old Style) or Gregorian (New Style) calendars. In a few instances, where the information was available, it was simply recorded.

The Julian calendar was in common use in Europe after it was authorized by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C., but increasing discrepancy with the seasons was noted. Pope Gregory XIII announced that the day after October 4, 1582 was to become October 15, thereby correcting the calendar by ten days. To prevent any further deviation it was also decreed that adjustments would be made to the leap years. Centennial years would be ordinary years unless they were divisible by 400; 1600 was therefore a leap year, while 1700, 1800 and 1900 were not. This corrects as closely as possible for the accepted actual length of the year, being 365.2422 days.

Most western Catholic countries accepted the Gregorian calendar soon after it was announced, although Protestant states such as Denmark, the Netherlands and northern Germany waited until 1700; Britain finally came on stream in 1752. Because the Gregorian calendar had been promulgated by a Roman Catholic pope it was not accepted by the Russian Orthodox Church and therefore not by Russia.

In the calculation of any accurate historical dates, therefore, one has to know both the date and the country in which the event transpired. Initially the discrepancy was ten days, this changed to 11 on March 1, 1700, then 12 on March 1, 1800, and finally to 13 days after March 1, 1900.

The Julian calendar was in use in Russia until February, 1918, when the revolutionary government decreed a switch. February 1 became February 14, thereby catching up the 13 days. The Russian Orthodox Church, however, still maintained the Julian calendar, and to this day some churches use it.

The early Anabaptists obviously used the Julian calendar, then increasingly after 1582 were in areas of Europe where the Gregorian calendar was in vogue. Mennonites in Prussia definitely used the Gregorian (New Style), but then had to switch to the Julian (Old Style) when they moved to Russia. Because of this peculiarity of dates, some celebrated Easter in Prussia, then celebrated it again some days later in Russia.

After February, 1918, all official documentation in the Soviet Union was according to the Gregorian calendar. Some Mennonites accepted this wholeheartedly and even corrected family records to

reflect this change. Others, for various reasons, did not. Some maintained old dates, for example birthdays, simply for sentimental reasons.

For purposes of this book no research has been done to determine which dates were used in the earlier Anabaptist periods, nor whether dates have been corrected in family records or other historical documents. It is assumed that primary records, for example those from Russia between 1789 and February, 1918, will have used the calendar in common use in Russia, the Julian (Old Style). All dates following February 14, 1918, are according to the Gregorian (New Style). Dates recorded in North America, in all time periods, use the Gregorian calendar.

## TEMPERATURES

Temperatures cited by Mennonites in Russia after 1830, and prior to 1918, were according to the Reaumur scale. This was established in 1830 by the French naturalist Reaumur, and had the freezing point of water at 0°R, the boiling point at 80°R. For comparison, each degree Reaumur equals 1 ¼ (1.25) degrees of Celsius or Centigrade and 2 ¼ (2.25) degrees of Fahrenheit. While Celsius became the official temperature scale in Russia after 1918, many Mennonites continued to use the Reaumur for some time, and even took their thermometers along to Canada when they emigrated in the 1920s.

Examples of temperature comparisons are:

	Reaumur	Celsius	Fahrenheit
Water Boils	+80°	+100°	+212°
	+30°	+37.5°	+99.5°
	+20°	+25°	+77°
	+10°	+12.5°	+54.5°
Water Freezes	0°	0°	+32°
	-10°	-12.5°	+9.5°
	-14.2°	-17.8°	0°
	-20°	-25°	-13°
	-30°	-37.5°	-35.5°

## COLONY

In this book the term "colony" is used to refer to a group of Mennonite villages which comprise a unit in a specific area, such as the Molotschna Colony or the Chortitza Colony. In some of the primary sources each individual village was referred to as a colony, such as the colony of Hierschau. I will not use this designation, but will consistently refer to the individual villages as *Dorf* or village, and to the large collection of villages as colony. This usage will even be employed in direct quotations, changing the word if necessary to maintain clarity.

Unfortunately the Mennonites of the Molotschna area added some confusion to the terminology by referring to their German neighbours on the west bank of the Molochnaya River as "The Colonists" (*Die Kolonisten*). This is not mentioned frequently enough in our text to change the basic usage of the word.



## RUSSO-TURKISH WARS

In general these wars could be characterized by a gradual weakening and territorial loss of the Turkish Empire. Russia's ambitions were to gain more territory in the southern Ukraine and around the Black Sea, to become the dominant power in the Balkans, to gain access first to the Black Sea, then to the Mediterranean Sea. Peter the Great (1682-1725) forced the Turks out of most of what is now the Ukraine.

1736-1739	In the wars during the eighteenth century
1768-1774	Russia and Austria were allies against the
1787-1792	Turks. Catherine the Great conquered the Crimea and opened southern Russia for settlement.
1806-1812	Russia gained Bessarabia.
1828-1829	Russia gained control of the eastern coast of the Black Sea.
1853-1856	Crimean War. Britain and France allied with the Turks. Russia lost dominant position in Balkans and Black Sea.
1877-1878	Russia regained some of the losses of the Crimean War.
1914-1917	World War I. Russia had hoped to gain Constanti- nople and the Dardanelles, but did not succeed.

## CZARS OF RUSSIA

### DURING THE MENNONITE PERIOD

Catharine II (The Great)	1762-1796	Conquered Crimea and opened southern Russia for settlement. First invited the Mennonites to Russia
Paul	1796-1801	Confirmed Mennonite privileges.
Alexander I	1801-1825	Allied with, then fought against Napoleon.
Nicholas I	1825-1855	Autocratic, police state, but some economic progress.
Alexander II	1855-1881	Introduced many reforms. Start of Russification of minorities, including Mennonites. Assassinated.
Alexander III	1881-1894	More authoritarian, although industry did well.
Nicholas II	1894-1917	Politically weak and unreliable. Probably shot 1918.

## GLOSSARY

(Words are High German unless otherwise designated. LG. is Low German.)

- Abschiedsgedicht — farewell poem  
 Aeltester — elder, commonly referring to a senior pastor, usually of a large church or even a group of churches  
 Allianz — alliance  
 Anbefohlen — strongly encouraged, also entrusted or commended  
 Anwohner — residents of a village who had no land  
 Arbeitsfaehige — wage earning age, or employable  
 Arshin — a unit of length used in Russia (see Weights and Measures)
- Beisitzer — assistant  
 Bestaunkoagel (LG) — melon and pumpkin patch  
 Bethausstreit — church building dispute  
 Bezirk — district  
 Bezirksamt — district office or administration  
 Bezirksrichter — district judge  
 Bruecke — bridge
- Dessiatine — a unit of land measure used in Russia (see Weights and Measures)  
 Dienstboten — domestic servant  
 Doopsgezinden (Dutch) — baptizers  
 Doppelphaeton — four seater car, or sedan  
 Dorf — village  
 Dorfamt — village administration  
 Dorfkarten — village cards, German army statistics collected on each village with an ethnic German population  
 Dorfschreiber — village clerk or secretary  
 Dorfschule — village school  
 Drepp (LG) — drop or drop-shaped  
 Droschka (Russian) — a four-wheeled wagon used by the Menonites, often very light, almost a platform on wheels
- Eck Stube — corner room  
 Eemskjekjniipa (LG) — ant pincers  
 Eemskjeklaui (LG) — ant claws or pincers  
 Eenschoa (LG) — one share plow
- Faspa (LG) — afternoon snack

- Feuerstellen — specific yard sites in a village  
Flucht — the Great Trek, the flight  
Forstei — forestry service, one of the alternate services available to the Mennonites in Russia  
Fortbildungsschule — intermediate school  
Fruchtmooss (LG) — fruit soup  
Fuder — a wagonload, such as a Leiterwagen full of sheaves of grain, also LG Feeda  
Fuehrer — leader  
Fuersorgekomitee — Committee Supervising Foreign Colonists in South Russia
- Gebiet — district, same as Bezirk  
Gebietsamt — district office or administration  
Gebietsschreiber — district clerk or secretary  
Gemeinde — a fellowship of believers, a local congregation or a group or organization of churches  
Geraeuschloser — quiet, without sound  
Gerstenstreit — barley war  
Grosse Gemeinde — literally, the large church, but also a specific group of congregations  
Grosse Stube — parlour
- Halbwirtschaft — half farm, usually with about 32 dessiatines land  
Hausbesuche — home visits  
Hauskagel — plot of land associated with the house  
Heikoagel (LG) — plot of land for hay  
Himmelbett — four-poster bed  
Hinterhaus — back room, utility room or back entrance  
Hueskoagel (LG) — plot of land associated with the house
- Kachelofen — tile stove  
Kagel — plot of land  
Kamer — pantry  
Kirchliche — another name for the Grosse Gemeinde  
Kleine Gemeinde — literally, the small church, but also a specific group of congregations  
Kleine Stube — small room  
Kleinwirtschaft — small farm. In earlier times a yard in the village with no allotted land. After the land distribution of the 1860s often, although not always, with a small land allotment.  
Klompelaja (LG) — one who stacks up or puts into piles

Knacksot (LG) — sunflower seeds  
 Koagel (LG) — plot of land  
 Kolkhozy (Russian) — collective or communal farms  
 Kolonisten — colonists  
 Kranaya Nyemka (Russian) — the German red cow  
 Kruschkje (Russian) — a type of small pear grown in Russia  
 Kueche — kitchen  
 Kulak (Russian) — wealthy farmer class, literally means village fist

Landwirtschaftliche Verein — Agricultural Society  
 Lauf — run, or running, as a motor  
 Laundheena (LG) — prairie chickens  
 Lehrer — teacher  
 Leiterwagen — ladder wagon. Farm wagon frame with ladders added to increase load capacity

Maedchenschule — girls school  
 Makhnowze (Russian) — followers of Makhno  
 Malkjmooss (LG) — milk soup  
 Malkjstock (LG) — milk stick  
 Mamuschka (Russian) — little mother  
 Maslozavod (Russian) — creamery  
 Mauergrapen — large stoneware cooking pot  
 Meddach (LG) — noon time, also noon meal  
 Mitarbeiter — active lay church worker  
 Musterwirte — model farmers  
 Musterwirtschaft — model farm

Nachfolge — dedicated discipleship  
 Naeajen Morge (LG) — nine units of a certain land area (see Weights and Measures)  
 Nebenhaus — separate or attached additional small house found on many Wirtschaft yards  
 Nojoage (LG) — chasing after, or simply to chase

Oberschulze — district chairman  
 Obojaner (Russian) — slightly larger four-wheeled wagon  
 Ofenbank — bench next to the tile stove

Paedagogische Schule — teachers college  
 Phaetone (French) — a light four-wheeled carriage  
 Piepkje (LG) — whistler  
 Plautdietsch (LG) — Low German

Plauwinj (LG) — low lying meadow which was often flooded  
 Pogge (LG) — frogs  
 Prediger — preacher or minister  
 Premarno (Russian) — example; Russian name for Hierschau  
 Pruefung — examination  
 Pruegel — spanking

Reamur (French) — temperature scale used in Russia (see explanation of temperatures)

Sanitaeter — medical orderly service, one of the alternative services available to Mennonites in Russia

Sarai (Russian) — “A” frame shed

Scheune — machine shed

Schneider — tailor

Schopnaes (LG) — sheep nose

Schrotsplueach (LG) — angled plow

Schulrat — school board

Schulze — mayor

Schulzenbott — village assembly

Selbstschutz — self-protection, most often referring to the defensive army established by the Mennonites

Somma Stow (LG) — summer room

Sommer Stube — summer room

Soviet (Russian) — a council or assembly

Sovkhozy (Russian) — state farm with wage-earning workers

Spasieba (Russian) — thank you

Steppenfeuer — grass or prairie fire

Thaler — Prussian dollar

Tweeback (LG) — double buns, the hallmark of Mennonite baking

Uetfoasteen (LG) — threshing stone

Uetjacht (LG) — path over which cattle were taken from the village main street to the pasture

Uetmeste (LG) — clean out the manure

Verdeckfederwagen — covered wagon with springs

Verschleppt — dragged away, commonly used to mean imprisonment followed by concentration or labour camp

Vertrauensmann — responsible person, acting mayor

Vollwirtschaft — full farm, usually about 65 dessiatines

Vorhaus — front room entrance

Vormuende — representatives

Vorsitzer — chairman

Waisenaeltester — advocate for orphans

Weisseeredegrube — white earth pit

Werst — a unit of distance used in Russia (see Weights and Measures)

Wirtschaft — farm, usually referring to the whole establishment, buildings, yard and associated land

Wolost (Russian) — after 1871 the new name for district

Wrenikje (LG) — dumplings

Zehntmaenner — deputies to represent every ten farmers in the village assembly

Zentralschule — high school

Ziffern — a numerical system of musical notation

Zwieback — double buns, the hallmark of Mennonite baking





## INDEX

All names, places, and major subjects have been indexed. A separate entry has been made for each person or place, accounting for a number of entries with the same name (there are, to the best of my knowledge, six Peter Friesens, therefore six separate entries). Where villages of the same name exist in Russia and also in North America, the North American town has additional information, such as state or province.

### A

Abrahams, Johann, 54  
 Abrahams, Johann, 180  
 Abramov, General, 250  
 Abrams, Rev. J., 265  
 Adrian, Heinrich, 85, 104  
 Adrian (nee Loewen), Helena, 86  
 Adriatic Sea, 262  
 Afforestation, 34  
 Africa, 211  
 Agricultural income, 63, 64  
 Agricultural production, 63, 64  
 Agricultural Society  
   (*Landwirtschaftliche Verein*), 33,  
   34, 35, 59, 60, 78, 129, 183, 184  
 Albania, 225, 231  
 Alberta, 202, 207, 265, 291  
 Albion, Neb., 93  
 Alexander, Man., 265, 291  
 Alexander I, 29  
 Alexander II, 86  
 Alexanderkrone, 29, 31, 61, 76, 93,  
   149, 157, 192, 244, 250, 305, 316,  
   318  
 Alexanderpol, 95, 178, 192  
 Alexandertal, 28, 31, 61, 150, 188,  
   206, 218, 249, 257, 268, 319  
 Alexanderwohl, xxiii, 28, 29, 31, 41,  
   61, 88, 89, 149, 157, 164, 188,  
   229, 284, 316, 319  
 Alexandrovsk, see Zaporozhye  
 Allianz Gemeinde, 153  
 Alma R., 83  
 Alt Kronsweide, 16  
 Altona, Man., 291  
 Altonau, 25, 28, 31, 51, 61, 68, 165,  
   171, 237, 316, 318  
 Alva, Duke of, 11  
 America, See U.S.A.  
 American Mennonite Relief, 273  
   276, 278, 279, 281, 282  
 Amsterdam, 7, 8, 13  
 Anabaptism, 4, 6, 8-10  
 Anabaptist(s), 4-11  
 Anabaptist-Mennonite, 1  
 Anadol, 230, 260  
 Animal Husbandry, 34  
 Antwerp, 98  
 Apanlee, 187, 189  
 Apanlee R., xxiii, 18, 19

Arab R., 18, 19  
 Archangel, 335, 345  
 Ardennes, 332  
 Assiniboine R., 265  
 Atlantic Ocean, 85, 196, 202  
 Augsburg, 6, 13  
 August III, 12  
 Austria, 6, 13, 37, 224-227, 229,  
   232, 234, 247, 263, 264, 333  
 Austria-Hungry, 224-227, 229, 231,  
   239  
 Azov, Sea of, 18, 171, 208, 209, 230,  
   250, 251, 260, 329

### B

Bachmut, 164, 165  
 Baden, 25  
 Baerg (Plett), Anna, 156  
 Baerg, Johann, 52  
 Baerg, Wilhelm, 248  
 Balaklava, 83  
 Balashovka, 339  
 Balkans, 83, 211, 224, 225, 229  
 Baltic Sea, 13, 83, 211, 212, 290, 298  
 Baltic States, 226, 231, 237, 313  
 Baptism, 4, 5, 9, 159  
 Baptism, infant, 4  
 Barbarossa, Operation, 313  
 Bartsch, Heinrich, 271  
 Bartsch, Johann, 14, 15, 16, 18  
 Basel, 13  
 Bauer, A., 281  
 Bavaria, 13, 25  
 Becker, Johann, 290, 307  
 Begim-Tschokrak R., xxiii, 18, 19,  
   39, 46, 48, 49, 129, 341, 343  
 Bekker, Hermann, 175  
 Bekker, Jacob, 71  
 Belgium, 140, 311, 313  
 Believer's Church, 6  
 Berdiansk, 63, 70, 88, 146, 169, 171,  
   209, 216, 233, 251, 273, 281, 282,  
   329, 337, 339  
 Bergen, Abram, 189, 190, 259  
 Bergen, Anna, 189  
 Bergen, Bernhard, 44, 47  
 Bergen, Bernhard, 117  
 Bergen, Gerhard, 307  
 Bergen, Heinrich, 117, 119, 307  
 Bergen, Helena, 189

Bergen, Susanna, 330, 334  
 Bergthal, 89  
 Bergthal Estate, 189, 194, 195  
 Berislav, 209, 331, 333  
 Berlin, 13, 99, 175, 231, 239, 333  
 Bethania, 151  
 Bezborodko, Chancellor, 15  
 Bijuk, Crimea, 324  
 Black Creek, B.C., 202, 203  
 Black Sea, 83, 209, 211, 231, 239,  
 250, 262, 267, 269, 315, 333  
 Blaurock, Georg, 4, 5, 10  
 Blumenfeld, 281  
 Blumenort, 28, 31, 61, 79, 199, 201,  
 243, 316, 318  
 Blumstein, 28, 31, 50, 61, 316, 318  
 Bobier, Andraei, 112  
 Boerwalde, 32  
 Bock, General von, 313  
 Boese, 119  
 Bogdanow(v)ka (Gnadenfeld), 234, 339  
 Boissevain, Man., 266  
 Boksart, 20  
 Boldt, Peter, 44, 47, 95, 96, 118  
 Boldt, Window Peter, 117  
 Bolshevik(s). See Communist(s)  
 Boone County, 98  
 Boschmann, Aganetha, 330, 335  
 Boschmann, Kornelius, 119, 146,  
 150, 222, 249  
 Boschman, Kornelius Jr., 110, 320,  
 330, 335  
 Boschmann, Kornelius, 332  
 Bosnia, 224, 229  
 Bosporous, 211, 231, 262  
 Boston, 264  
 Bouwens, Leenaert, 10  
 Brandenburg, 26  
 Braun, Alice, 265  
 Braun (Herfort), Anna, 122  
 Braun, Elisabeth, 120, 123, 249, 259,  
 291, 293, 295, 298  
 Braun, Franz, 123, 259  
 Braun, H., 230  
 Braun, Heinrich, xxi, 38, 123, 126,  
 230, 241, 242, 243, 248, 249, 254,  
 259-266, 287, 289, 291, 292  
 Braun, Heinrich, 179  
 Braun (Dyck), Helena, 122  
 Braun, Johann, 122, 123, 259, 291  
 Braun, Johann Jr., 122  
 Braun, John, 265  
 Braun (Reimer), Katharina, 122  
 Braun, Leonard, 265  
 Braun (Wall), Maria, 120, 123, 128,  
 159, 190, 249, 250, 257, 258, 259,  
 291, 294  
 Braun, Maria, 179  
 Braun (Peters), Susanna, 122, 292,  
 294, 295

Brazil, 287, 289  
 Bremen, 13  
 Brest Litovsk, 226, 231, 236, 237,  
 239  
 Brest Litovsk, Treaty of, 227, 237,  
 240  
 Britain, see England  
 British Columbia, 192, 197, 202, 203,  
 218, 219  
 Bruderfeld, 84, 85, 104, 178  
 Bruderfeld, Sask., 85, 104, 265  
 Brusilov Offensive, 225  
 Budapest, 231, 239  
 Buhler, Kansas, 86, 104  
 Bulgaria, 231, 239  
 Buller, Mrs., 124  
 Buller, David, 44, 47, 54, 90, 91  
 Buller, Heinrich, 90  
 Buller, Jakob, 88  
 Buller (nee Lohrenz), Maria, 94  
 Buller, Peter, 90  
 Buschmann, Gerhard, 90  
 Busuluk District, 220

## C

California, 98  
 Camel, 254, 255  
 Canada, xxi, 20, 72, 74, 75, 80, 88,  
 89, 104, 155, 173, 189, 192, 196,  
 202, 207, 219, 223, 265, 272, 285,  
 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 298,  
 299  
 Canadian Mennonite Board of  
 Colonization, 285, 286  
 Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), 285  
 Carpathian Mountains, 224  
 Case, J.I. Company, 142  
 Caspian Sea, 269, 315  
 Catherine II, Czarina, 14, 15  
 Catholic, 25, 317, 321  
 Caucasus, 83, 224, 313  
 Cherbourg, 264  
 Chernigov District, 337, 339  
 Chernigow(v)ka (Tschernigowka), 19,  
 24, 171, 176, 243, 244, 247, 248,  
 252, 253, 261, 337, 339  
 Chicago, Illinois, 153, 264  
 Chicken Pox, 322  
 China, 287, 288  
 Choir, 110, 297  
 Chortitza (colony), xxi, 15, 16, 17,  
 18, 25, 30, 32, 35, 58, 63, 67, 80,  
 89, 99, 141, 153, 244, 267, 286,  
 314  
 Chortitza (village), 16, 38, 209  
 Church (*Gemeinde*), 9, 10  
 Civil War, 173, 267, 276, 281  
 Claassen, Johann, 70, 71  
 Clearbrook, 203  
 Collectivization, xxi, 301, 307

Communist(s) (Bolshevik), 161, 162,  
186, 187, 207, 223, 226, 236, 237,  
244, 245, 254, 255, 256, 262, 283,  
284, 301, 302, 307, 309, 320  
Compiègne, 227, 240  
Colonists, 25, 77  
Constantine, Emperor, 1  
Constantinople, 83, 211, 231, 239  
Cornies, Agnes, 36  
Cornies, Johann, xxi, 1, 22, 24,  
32-36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 59, 60, 62,  
63, 67, 68, 77, 78, 140, 141, 183,  
192, 311, 345  
Cornies, Johann (Jr.), 36  
Cossacks, 24, 254  
Cossack Division(s), 244, 250, 251,  
252, 253  
Creamery, xxii, 309, 320, 323, 341,  
343  
Crimea, xxi, 32, 44, 45, 46, 63, 80,  
83, 84, 85, 89, 92, 93, 99, 104,  
156, 159, 164, 175, 178, 188, 192,  
193, 199, 207, 208, 210, 218, 243,  
244, 250, 262, 315, 317, 324, 325  
Crimean War, 69, 83-84, 86, 164,  
167, 208, 211  
Crowfoot, Alberta, 291  
Czechoslovakia, 226, 332

## D

Dakota, 89  
Dalmeny, Sask., 192, 199, 202, 203, 291  
Danube R., 13, 211  
Danzig, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 32  
Dardanelles, 211, 224, 262  
Davidson, Sask., 199, 202  
Delesky, Mrs., 330  
Delesky, Gerhard, 330, 331  
Denck, Hans, 6, 10  
Denikin, General, 242, 243, 244, 261  
Denmark, 311, 313  
Dennis, Colonel J.S., 285  
Derksen, Mrs., 330  
Derksen, Daniel, 330, 334  
Derksen, Mrs. Daniel, 330  
Derksen, Gredel, 330  
Derksen, Heinrich, 117, 118, 119  
Derksen, Jakob, 330  
Derksen, Mrs. Jakob, 330  
Derksen, Rev. Peter, 266  
Dick, Mrs., 330  
Dick, David, 187  
Dick, David J., 236, 238  
Didsbury, Alberta, 202  
Diphtheria, 72, 320, 322  
Dirk-Dick, 67  
Discipleship, 5, 9  
Dmitrii Donskoi, 243  
Dniestr R., 15, 16, 63, 209, 250, 251,  
314, 315, 316, 324, 327, 331, 333

Dniestr R., 209  
Dobenko, General, 243, 248, 261  
Doerksen, Abram, 90  
Doerksen, Anna, 218  
Doerksen, David, 90  
Doerksen, Heinrich F., 272  
Doerksen, Johann, 45  
Doerksen, Johann, 95  
Doerksen, Johann, 156  
Domestic Servants, 77  
Don Division(s), 244, 250, 251, 252,  
253  
Don Region (Basin), 32, 313  
Don R., 209, 269, 315  
Doopsgezinden (Baptists), 10  
Dorfkaten, 311, 317, 318, 319, 320,  
321, 322, 323  
Dovgo (Konteniusfeld), 339  
Drill-Bukker, 143  
Drosdovze Division, 252, 253  
Dubassow, Governor-General  
Admiral, 213  
Dubrovna, 15  
Dueck, Abram, 117  
Dueck, Franz, 44, 47  
Dueck, Dr. Franz, 160  
Dueck, Heinrich, 54  
Dueck, Jakob J., 272, 281  
Dueckman (Duerksen), Elisabeth,  
218, 221, 222  
Duerksen, Mr., 90  
Duerksen, Widow, 117  
Duerksen, Anna, 218  
Duerksen, Benjamin, 109, 119, 151  
Duerksen, David, 218  
Duerksen, David J., 110, 111, 185,  
193, 219, 277, 289  
Duerksen, Elisabeth, 218, 277  
Duerksen, Gerhard, 206, 216, 217,  
218, 219  
Duerksen, Gerhard, 218  
Duerksen, Gerhard, 218  
Duerksen, Heinrich, 272  
Duerksen, Helena, 218  
Duerksen, Jakob, 111, 218, 307,  
309  
Duerksen, Jakob G., xxi, 62, 117,  
119, 143, 150, 188, 194, 195, 205,  
206, 207, 217, 218-222, 229, 277,  
309  
Duerksen, Johann, 44, 47  
Duerksen, Johann, 218  
Duerksen, Katharina, 111, 218  
Duerksen, Kornelius, 218  
Duerksen, Mrs. Kornelius, 105  
Duerksen (Rempel, Thiessen), Maria,  
178, 179  
Duerksen, Maria J., 111, 218, 277  
Duerksen, Martin, 218  
Duerksen, Michael, 43, 44, 117

Duerksen, Sara, 111, 218  
 Dukhobors, 24, 25, 35  
 Duma, 214, 215, 216, 225, 235  
 Dutch, *see* Netherlands  
 Dyck, Aganetha, 292  
 Dyck, Anna, 111  
 Dyck, Franz, 117  
 Dyck, Franz, 289, 292, 293, 295, 296, 298  
 Dyck, Widow Franz, 119, 151  
 Dyck, Heinrich, 144  
 Dyck, Jakob, 332  
 Dyck Johann, 111  
 Dyck, Katharina, 289, 292, 296, 297, 298  
 Dyck, Margaretha, 292  
 Dyck, Pauline, 111  
 Dyck, Peter, 119, 234, 289, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298  
 Dysentery, 320, 322

## E

Earthquake, 22  
 East Chilliwack, 192  
 Ebert, 227  
 Eemskjekjniëpa, 109, 121  
 Eichenfeld, 243  
 Einlage, 16  
 Eitzen, Aganetha, 179  
 Ekk, Peter, 95  
 Elbe R., 13, 333, 334  
 Elbing, 12, 13, 17  
 Elisabeththal, 29, 31, 61, 71, 319  
 Emden, 6, 13  
 Engbrecht, Aganetha, 178  
 Engbrecht, Johann, 84  
 Engbrecht, Peter, 44, 47, 84, 85, 104, 178  
 Engels, Friederich, 37  
 England, 11, 83, 224, 225, 226, 290, 291, 298, 312  
 Enid, Oklahoma, 104, 264  
 Enns, Abraham, 297  
 Enns, G., 160  
 Enns, Johann, 102  
 Enns, Family Nicholai, 324  
 Epp, David, 17  
 Epp, David H., 38  
 Epp, Johann H., 252, 281  
 Epp, Peter, 252  
 Erasmus, 3  
 Estonia, 333  
 Eupatoria, 83  
 Europe, 13, 167, 170, 231, 239, 275, 285, 287, 311  
 Evangelism, 10  
 Ewert, Isaak, 155  
 Ewert, Peter, 62  
 Ewert, Wilhelm, 62

## F

Famine, xxi, 160, 267-279  
 Fast, Aron, 44, 47  
 Fast, Daniel J., 186, 189, 259  
 Fast, Gerhard, 86  
 Fast, Gerhard Aron, 95  
 Fast, Jakob, 44, 47  
 Fast, Jakob, 281, 289  
 Fast, Johann, 117, 119, 272, 307  
 Fast, Johann Aron, 52  
 Fast, Justina, 281  
 Fast, Margaretha, 111  
 Fast (nee Plett), Margaretha, 330  
 Fast (Peters), Maria, 194  
 Feodorowka, 170, 171, 172, 316  
 Feuerstellen, 40  
 Fischau, 28, 31, 36, 61, 188, 194, 318  
 Flanders, 10, 13  
 Fleischhauer, Mr., 329, 331  
 Flemish, 11, 16, 27, 28, 29, 30  
 Flemish, Old or Groningen Old, 28, 29, 39, 70  
 Forstei, 87, 156, 159, 207, 208-209, 220, 229, 230, 260  
 Foundations of Christian Doctrine, 7  
 France, 3, 14, 37, 83, 224, 225, 231, 247, 264, 311, 313, 332  
 Franz Ferdinand, Archduke, 224, 229  
 Franzen (Regier), Katharina, 97, 98  
 Franztal, 28, 31, 53, 61, 319  
 Fraser Valley, 345  
 Frederick the Great, 12  
 Frederick William II, 14  
 Frederick William III, 17  
 Friedensdorf, xxiii, 29, 31, 41, 44, 61, 122, 150, 156, 162, 163, 189, 250, 252, 305, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323  
 Friedensruh, 29, 31, 61, 76, 86, 178, 318  
 Friedensstimme, 142, 151, 167, 175, 176, 193, 215, 220, 234  
 Friesen, David A, 37, 60, 71, 78, 79  
 Friesen, H., 211  
 Friesen, Jakob J., 110, 111, 281, 282, 289  
 Friesen, Johann, 71  
 Friesen, Johann, 119  
 Friesen, Klaas, 69  
 Friesen, P.P., 232  
 Friesen, Peter, 44, 47  
 Friesen, Peter, 90  
 Friesen, Peter, 117  
 Friesen, Peter, 149, 157  
 Friesen, Peter, 178  
 Friesen, Peter, 323  
 Friesen (nee Wiebe), Susanna, 323  
 Frisia, 6, 7, 11, 13  
 Frisians, 11, 27, 28, 29, 30  
 Froese, P. 286  
 Fuersorgekomitee, 33, 35, 36, 59, 62, 68, 69, 78, 207, 216

Fuerstenau, 24, 25, 28, 31, 61, 156,  
318  
Fuerstenland, 89  
Fuerstenwerder, xiii, 28, 31, 37, 41,  
61, 319  
Funk, Johann, 95  
Funk, John F., 88  
Funk, Kornelius, 167

## G

Gaede, Heinrich, 308  
Gaede, Katharina, 308  
Gaede, Peter, 308  
Galacia, 224, 225, 231  
Gavel, 32, 33  
German Army, troops or soldiers,  
xxi, xxii, 173, 223, 236, 237, 238,  
239, 240, 241, 242, 247, 260, 261,  
309, 311, 313, 314, 315, 317, 324,  
327, 329, 331, 337, 341  
German Red Cow, 140, 141  
German Regiment, 244  
Germany, xxi, 1, 3, 6, 7, 11, 37, 125,  
133, 143, 172, 173, 183, 190, 207,  
224, 225, 226, 227, 229, 231, 239,  
240, 242, 263, 285, 286, 287, 288,  
311, 313, 315, 316, 317, 332, 333,  
334, 335, 345,  
Gerstenreit, 69  
Gnadenau, Kansas, 52, 90  
Gnadenfeld (village), xxiii, 26, 29,  
31, 36, 41, 50, 51, 52, 61, 62, 69,  
70, 72, 149, 165, 171, 176, 184,  
187, 193, 219, 220, 230, 232, 233,  
234, 240, 242, 243, 248, 251, 252,  
253, 261, 273, 283, 302, 316, 319  
Gnadenfeld (*Wolost*), xxi, 61, 62,  
150, 164, 168, 175, 176, 185, 187,  
188, 195, 206, 207, 211, 216, 218,  
219, 220, 230, 232, 233, 238, 240,  
242, 248, 270, 273, 274, 277, 278,  
281, 282  
Gnadenheim, xxiii, 28, 31, 41, 44,  
61, 97, 101, 163, 319, 320, 321,  
322, 323  
Gnadtental, xxiii, 29, 31, 41, 61, 76,  
316, 319  
Goering, Hermann, 313  
Goertzen, G., 264  
Goertzen, Helena, 289  
Goretzen, Hermann, 110, 240, 260,  
289  
Goertzen, Isaak, 90  
Goertzen, Isaak, 103  
Goertzen, Johann, 155  
Goertzen, Kornelius, 117, 174  
Goertzen, Kornelius, 307  
Goertzen, Peter, 119, 147  
Goertzen, Peter K., 262, 263, 264,  
265, 287, 289

Goertzen, Susanna, 90  
Goertz, *Aeltester* Abraham, 199, 210,  
215  
Goertz, Abraham, 199  
Goertz, Anne, 199, 202  
Goertz, Franz, 27  
Goertz, Heinrich, 199, 202  
Goertz, Helena, 199, 202  
Goertz, Johann, 199  
Goertz, Johann A., 153, 192, 199-203,  
215, 276, 289, 291  
Goertz, Katharina, 199  
Goertz, Margaretha, 199, 202  
Goertz, Rudolph, 199  
Goertz, Walter, 199  
Goossen, Mr., 90  
Goossen, Mr., 150  
Goossen, Anna, 44  
Goossen, Dietrich, 44, 47  
Goossen, Gerhard, 90  
Goossen, H., 268  
Goossen, Peter, 44  
Goossen, Dr. Peter, 178  
Gorki Collective Farm, xxi, 337, 341,  
344  
Grande Pointe, Man., 196  
Great Trek (*Die Flucht*), xxii, 311,  
327-335  
Grebbe, Conrad, 4, 5, 10  
Greece, 231, 262  
Greek Orthodox (Church), 75  
Greendale, B.C., 197  
Gretna, Man., 192, 291  
Groningen, 7, 13  
Gross Tokmak (Tokmak), 19, 24, 113,  
147, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 179,  
213, 250, 251, 252, 316, 318  
Grosse Gemeinde, 30, 68, 94, 149,  
161  
Grossweide, 28, 31, 51, 61, 62, 151,  
319  
Grunau, Prussia, 54  
Gulag Archipelago, 335  
Gypsies, 25  
Gypsies, Crimean, 324, 325

## H

Hahn, 68  
Halbstadt (village), 20, 21, 24, 25, 28,  
31, 51, 60, 61, 62, 67, 77, 143,  
153, 164, 165, 167, 168, 169, 170,  
171, 172, 173, 175, 178, 186, 187,  
188, 190, 192, 194, 209, 210, 215,  
230, 232, 234, 235, 236, 237, 240,  
251, 252, 253, 269, 270, 273, 275,  
301, 316, 318  
Halbstadt (*Wolost*), 61, 62, 153, 168,  
175, 176, 211, 230, 232, 237, 238,  
240, 242, 270, 271, 274, 275  
Halbstadt Bethausstreit, 68, 69

Halbstadt Days of Terror, 237, 242, 260  
 Halder, General, 314  
 Hamberg, xxiii, 29, 31, 41, 61, 76, 86, 146, 248, 268, 316, 318, 337  
 Hamburg, 104, 333  
 Hamilton County, 101  
 Hammerstein, 287  
 Hammonia, S.S., 85  
 Harbin, China, 288  
 Harder, Abraham, 178, 187, 188  
 Harder, Johann, 54  
 Harder, *Aeltester* Johann, 71  
 Harder (Thiessen), Margaretha, 178  
 Harms, Mr., 45, 86  
 Harms, Abraham, 180  
 Harms, Bernard S., 45, 86  
 Harms, Peter, 163  
 Heidebrecht, Mr. 44, 47  
 Heidebrecht, Katharina, 120  
 Heidebrecht, Susanna, 120  
 Heidelberg, 13  
 Heinrichs, Dr., 233  
 Henderson, Neb., 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 97, 98, 99, 101, 102, 103, 180, 264, 265, 345  
 Hepburn, Sask., 202  
 Hermannsburg, 327, 333  
 Herold der Wahrheit, 88  
 Herzenberg, 281  
 Hesse, 25  
 Heyndricks, Anneken, 8  
 Hiebert, C.N., 196  
 Hiebert, G.G. 274, 275  
 Hiebert, Jakob, 46, 187  
 Hierschau, many references throughout  
 High German, 11  
 Hildebrand, Mrs., 330  
 Hildebrand, Erich, 330, 332  
 Hildebrand, Jakob, 138  
 Hildebrand, Jakob P., 272  
 Hildebrand, Johann P., 272  
 Hildebrand, Margaretha, 44, 52  
 Hildebrand, Peter, 44, 47  
 Hildebrand, Mrs. Peter, 53  
 Hildebrandt, David, 119, 161, 305, 307, 330, 335  
 Hildebrandt, Elisabeth, 330  
 Hildebrandt, Gerhard, 330, 332  
 Hildebrandt, Jakob, 117, 119  
 Hildebrandt, Jakob, 330, 332  
 Hildebrandt, Johann, 117, 118, 119, 147, 150  
 Hildebrandt, Johann, 193  
 Hildebrandt, Katharina, 330  
 Hildebrandt, Maria, 330  
 Hillsboro, Kansas, 86, 104, 105, 163, 180, 345  
 Hirschau, 38

Hitler, Adolf, 311  
 Hochfeld, 199  
 Hoemsen, Widow Heinrich, 112, 113  
 Hoepfner, Jacob, 14, 15, 16, 18  
 Hofer, David M., 153, 154, 160, 201, 273, 275, 279  
 Hoffman, Melchior, 6, 10  
 Hoffnungstal, Kansas, 52  
 Hoge, Mrs., 330  
 Hoge, Anna, 330  
 Hoge, Jascha, 330  
 Holland, see Netherlands  
 Horb, 5, 13  
 Hubmaier, Dr. Balthasar, 6, 10  
 Huebert, Heinrich, 71  
 Huebert, Family Heinrich, 324  
 Huebert, Family Nicholai, 324  
 Huebner, Abraham H., 272, 289  
 Huebner, Abram, 119  
 Hungary, 234, 315, 332, 333  
 Hut, Hans, 10  
 Hutterites, 35, 36, 88  
 Huttertal, 36

## I

India, 151  
 Indulgences, 3  
 Industry and Manufacturing, 67  
 Ingolstadt, 13  
 Inkerman, 83  
 Inn R., 13  
 Insel Chortitza, 16  
 Irkutsk, 226  
 Isaac, Franz, 102  
 Isaak, Johann, 215  
 Islavin, Privy Counsellor, 78  
 Istanbul, see Constantinople  
 Italy, 3, 37, 169, 224, 231, 313

## J

Jablonowka, 235  
 Janz, B.B., 284, 285, 286  
 Janz, Ben, 281  
 Janz, Heinrich, 215  
 Janz, Heinrich, 289  
 Janz, Heinrich T., 149, 155, 161, 162  
 Janz (nee Boese), Helena, 95  
 Janzen, Mr., 330, 334  
 Janzen Family, 305  
 Janzen, Heinrich, 39  
 Janzen (Willms), Helena, 207  
 Janzen, Mrs. I., 330  
 Janzen, Isaak, 119  
 Janzen, Jakob, 90  
 Janzen, Jakob, 117  
 Janzen, Jakob, 118, 119, 307  
 Janzen, Jakob, 330  
 Janzen, Family Jakob, 324  
 Janzen, Johann, 90

Janzen, Johann, 193  
 Janzen, Kornelius, 88  
 Janzen, Kornelius, 117, 138  
 Janzen, Kornelius J., 289  
 Janzen, Peter, 69  
 Janzen, Tina, 330  
 Japan, 211, 216, 226, 247  
 Jekaterinoslaw(v), 59, 209, 230, 242  
 Jekaterinoslaw(v) (Province), 209,  
 210, 213  
 Jews, 35, 36, 75, 118, 119, 263, 317,  
 331  
 Johannesruh, 36  
 John III or Poland, 12  
 Juschanlee (Yushanli) R., 18, 19, 33,  
 171, 339  
 Jusowka, 213

## K

Kachovka, 327, 331, 333  
 Kaethler (nee Plett), Aganetha, 330,  
 335  
 Kaethler, Heinrich, 307  
 Kaethler, Hilda, 330  
 Kamentz, 178  
 Kamenetz Podolsk (Kamenec  
 Podolskij), 327, 331, 333  
 Kamianka, 337  
 Kansas, 89, 90, 91, 92  
 Karaganda, 345  
 Karassan, 84  
 Kasankowat, 112  
 Kazakhstan, 314  
 Kerensky, 226, 236  
 Kertch, 209  
 Kharkov, 199, 239, 269, 315, 329  
 Kherson, 15, 63, 209  
 Kherson (Province), 80, 209, 210,  
 213  
 Khlebnoye (Landskrone), 234  
 Kiel Canal, 290, 298  
 Kiev, 231, 237, 239, 269, 315, 333  
 Kirchliche Gemeinde, 149, 150, 153  
 Kisselew, Count, 37  
 Kitchener, 345  
 Klassen, *Oberschulze*, 68  
 Klassen, Mrs., 214  
 Klassen, Agnes, 32  
 Klassen, C.F., 286  
 Klassen (Plett), Elisabeth, 156  
 Klassen, Family Franz, 324  
 Klassen (nee Neufeld), Margaret, 323  
 Klassen, Peter, 258  
 Klaus, 57  
 Kleefeld, 29, 31, 61, 76, 101, 192,  
 250, 306, 316, 318  
 Kleine Gemeinde, 30, 71, 89  
 Klippenfeld, 29, 31, 41, 61, 76, 77,  
 86, 92, 94, 97, 98, 101, 248, 268,  
 316, 318

Kochubei, Count, 80  
 Koehn, Heinrich, 95  
 Koehn (Sperling), Helena, 54  
 Koehn, Kornelius, 309  
 Koehn, Peter, 155, 297  
 Koehn, Victor, 307, 308  
 Koenigsberg, 11, 12, 13  
 Kommission fuer  
 Kirchenangelegenheiten (KfK),  
 283  
 Kontenius, Samuel, 35, 59  
 Konteniusfeld, 29, 30, 31, 35, 41, 61,  
 176, 316, 319  
 Konzewitsch, Priest Wassilij, 233  
 Koop, Elizabeth, 267  
 Koop, Heinrich, 149, 157  
 Koop, Isaak, 71  
 Koop, Jakob, 267  
 Korea, 211  
 Kornilov Division, 126, 250, 251,  
 252, 253, 257  
 Kotlas, 335  
 Kratz, Clayton, 273  
 Kremenichuk, 209  
 Krimmer Mennonite Brethren  
 Church, 52, 89  
 Kroeker, Abraham, 175, 235  
 Kroeker, Gerhard K., 272, 281, 282,  
 289  
 Kroeker, Heinrich, 117, 119  
 Kroeker, Jakob, 175  
 Kroeker, Susanna, 111  
 Krongarten, 16  
 Kuban, 71, 80  
 Kulm, 12, 13  
 Kroeker (Braun), Tina, 265  
 Kulak, 303, 304  
 Kunkel, Aganetha, 52  
 Kunkel, Tobias, 44, 47, 90, 91  
 Kunkel, Tobias, Jr., 90  
 Kuruschan (Kurudujuschan) R., xxiii,  
 18, 19  
 Kutno, 332, 333

## L

Ladekopp, 21, 24, 28, 31, 61, 147,  
 179, 199, 207, 316, 318  
 Landless, 77-80  
 Landskrone, xxiii, 29, 31, 36, 38, 39,  
 40, 41, 45, 47, 50, 51, 52, 61, 62,  
 65, 80, 110, 120, 149, 150, 154,  
 155, 157, 161, 162, 163, 170, 172,  
 184, 189, 193, 195, 196, 218, 232,  
 233, 234, 252, 253, 273, 283, 292,  
 305, 306, 309, 316, 319, 320, 321,  
 322, 323  
 Lange, Wilhelm, 26  
 Latvia, 290, 333  
 Leamington, Ontario, 190  
 Lech R., 13

Lechfeld, Germany, 286  
 Leeb, General von, 313  
 Lemberg, see Lvov  
 Lemberg, Battle of, 224  
 Lender, Peter, 90  
 Lenin, V.I., 226, 236  
 Leningrad, see St. Petersburg  
 Lenzmann, *Aeltester* August, 69, 70  
 Lesnoye (Waldheim), 234  
 Leyden, Jan of, 6  
 Liaotung Peninsula, 211  
 Lichtenau, 28, 30, 31, 61, 170, 171,  
 172, 173, 174, 179, 240, 316, 318  
 Lichtenauer *Grosse Gemeinde*, 30, 68  
 Lichtenau-Petershagen *Gemeinde*, 30,  
 68, 304, 305  
 Lichtfelde, 26, 28, 31, 61, 151, 296,  
 318  
 Liebenau, 29, 31, 41, 61, 308, 318  
 Limmat R., 5, 13  
 Lindenau, 28, 31, 61, 179, 237, 318  
 Lithuania, 333  
 Litzmannstadt (Lodz), 332, 333  
 Liverpool, 291  
 Loewen, Mr., 147  
 Loewen, Dietrich, 104  
 Loewen, Heinrich, 44, 47, 84, 85  
 Loewen (nee Unruh), Helena, 86  
 Loewen, Isaak, 104  
 Loewen, Jakob, 44, 47, 50, 84, 85,  
 104  
 Loewen, Jakob L., 85, 104-105  
 Loewen, Johann, 95  
 Loewen, Johann, 117, 138  
 Loewen, Kornelius, 85  
 Loewen, Kornelius, 273, 278, 281, 282  
 Loewen, Maria, 85  
 Loewen, Maria, 105  
 Lohrenz and Reimer Store, 175  
 Love, Forgiveness, 9  
 Low German (*Plautdietsch*), 11, 241,  
 294  
 Lowlands, see Netherlands  
 Luetke Sisters, 119  
 Luetke, Jakob, 119  
 Lugowsk, 220  
 Luther, Martin, 3  
 Lutheran(s), 25, 75, 321  
 Lutheran Church, 14, 70  
 Lvov (Lemberg), 231, 239, 313, 315,  
 333  
 Lvov, Prince, 225, 235

## M

McCool, Nebraska, 102  
 Mackenzie, William Lyon, 285  
 Main R., 13  
 Main Centre, Sask., 189, 265  
 Makhno(wze), 127, 201, 223, 240,  
 242, 243, 247, 248, 249, 261

Malaria, 320, 322  
 Manchuria, 211, 212  
 Manitoba, 88, 89, 192, 196, 265, 266  
 Manz, Felix, 4, 5  
 Margenau, xxiii, 26, 28, 31, 41, 61,  
 68, 94, 97, 149, 156, 157, 180,  
 218, 250, 284, 316, 319  
 Margenau (Schoensee) (Landskrone)  
 (Alexanderwohl) *Gemeinde*, 30,  
 68, 94, 147, 149, 157, 188, 207,  
 222, 275  
 Mariawohl, xxiii, 29, 31, 41, 61, 76,  
 319  
 Marienburg, 17  
 Marienort, Memrik, 188, 194  
 Mariental, 28, 31, 61, 93, 319  
 Marion, S.D., 90  
 Mariupol, 170, 209, 239, 329  
 Marpeck, Pilgram, 6  
 Marquette, Man., 196  
 Marsch, Roland, 266  
 Martens (nee Siemens), Mrs., 330,  
 334  
 Martens, H., 233  
 Martens, Heinrich, 140  
 Martens, Johann, 44, 47  
 Martens, Kornelius, 187, 233, 283,  
 302  
 Martens, Wilhelm, 176  
 Marx, Karl, 37  
 Matthys, Jan, 6  
 Mediterranean Sea, 83, 211  
 Meier, Major, 14  
 Melitopol, 169, 171, 209, 243, 251,  
 252, 296, 302, 333  
 Memrik, 80, 95, 188, 192, 194  
 Mennists, 7  
 Mennonite Brethren Church, 70-72,  
 85, 89, 92, 94, 97, 98, 99, 101,  
 102, 104, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153,  
 155, 161, 175, 192, 196, 202, 218,  
 222, 265, 266  
 Mennonite Central Committee  
 (M.C.C.), 153, 155, 164, 169, 223,  
 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 279,  
 282  
 Mennonite Commonwealth, 1, 57,  
 107, 207, 223  
 Mennonites, 7, 77, 88, 89, 229, 275,  
 311  
 Mennonitische Rundschau, 43, 95,  
 149, 160, 174, 179, 180, 218, 272  
 Merino Sheep, 34  
 Mexico, 207, 286, 288, 289, 291  
 Michailowka, 94, 171, 179, 206  
 Mierau, Jakob, 306  
 Mierau, Peter, 306  
 Military Service, 86, 87, 88  
 Miliutin, Dmitri, 86  
 Miller, Orie, 273



Ministry of State Domains, 78  
 Minnesota, 85, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93,  
   101, 178  
 Moelln, 287  
 Molochnaya R., 18, 19, 25, 165, 170,  
   171, 253  
 Molokans, 24, 35, 36  
 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, 313  
 Molotschansk (Halbstadt), 234, 235,  
   302  
 Molotschna (Colony), xxi, xxii, xxiii,  
   1, 17-36, 57-81, 141, 145, 146,  
   151, 153, 165, 167, 170, 171, 213,  
   234, 239, 250, 253, 267, 301, 302,  
   314, 315, 318, 319, 327, 329, 339  
 Molotschna *Bruecke*, 170, 171, 172  
 Molotschna Mennonite Teachers  
   Society, 187  
 Mongolian, 24  
 Montenegro, 225, 231  
 Montnairn, S.S., 196, 202  
 Moravia, 6, 13  
 Moscow, 26, 212, 213, 231, 239, 269,  
   287, 289, 290, 298, 304, 313, 315  
 Mountain Lake, Minn., 90, 180  
 Muenster, 6, 7, 13  
 Muensterberg, 28, 30, 31, 61, 237,  
   316, 318  
 Mukden, Battle of, 212  
 Muntau, 21, 28, 31, 51, 61, 113, 179,  
   193, 232, 317  
 Murmansk, 226  
 Musterwirtschaft, 32, 35, 38

## N

Namaka, Alberta, 265, 291  
 Napoleon, 26  
 Nebraska, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 98,  
   101, 102, 103, 178, 180, 206, 263,  
   264  
 Nebraska, *Ansiedler*, 174  
 Neckar R., 13  
 Nelgowka, 297, 298  
 Netherlands, also Dutch, Holland,  
   Lowlands, 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13,  
   43, 48, 160, 227, 240, 276, 284,  
   285, 311, 313  
 Neu Samara, 80, 95, 178  
 Neudorf, Mr., 119  
 Neudorf, Mr., 248  
 Neudorf, Boy, 293  
 Neuenburg, 16  
 Neuendorf, 16  
 Neufeld, Aaron F., 262, 263, 264,  
   287, 289  
 Neufeld, Anna, 330, 335  
 Neufeld, Aron, 314  
 Neufeld, Erika, 330  
 Neufeld, Franz, 119, 307  
 Neufeld, Frieda, 330

Neufeld, Gerhard, 54  
 Neufeld, Gerhard, 119, 289  
 Neufeld, Gerhard, 292  
 Neufeld, Gerhard, 330  
 Neufeld, Heinrich, 289  
 Neufeld, Hilda, 330  
 Neufeld, Isaak, 168, 176  
 Neufeld, J.J., 142, 214  
 Neufeld, Jakob, 95  
 Neufeld, Jakob P., 289  
 Neufeld, Johann, 69  
 Neufeld, Johann, 292, 293  
 Neufeld, Johann, 330  
 Neufeld (Sperling), Katharina, 54  
 Neufeld, Katharina, 330  
 Neufeld, Kornelius, 330, 332  
 Neufeld, Margaret, 330  
 Neufeld, Maria, 111  
 Neufeld (Willms), Maria, 192  
 Neufeld, Peter, 117, 119, 130, 143,  
   307  
 Neufeld, Peter, 330  
 Neuhalbstadt, 34, 36, 61, 67, 69,  
   140, 168, 176  
 Neukrich, 26, 28, 31, 61, 188, 318  
 Neumann, J., 24  
 New Brunswick, 291  
 New York, 85, 91, 104, 264  
 Nicholai, Grand Duke, 225  
 Nicholas I, Czar, 37  
 Nicholas II, Czar, 212, 214, 216, 217,  
   225, 235, 244  
 Nickel, Henry, 101  
 Nickel, J., 233  
 Nicknames, 109  
 Nikolaidorf, xxiii, 29, 31, 41, 61, 76,  
   77, 86, 124, 156, 259, 319  
 Nikolajev, 209  
 Niverville, Man., 196  
 Nogais, 24, 35, 36  
 Nogat, R., 11, 13  
 Non-Resistance, 9, 240, 246, 284  
 North America, 88, 167, 170, 174  
 North-End Mennonite Brethren  
   Church, 196  
 North Enid, 102, 103  
 North Kildonan, 266  
 North Sea, 13  
 Norway, 231, 311, 313  
 Novokasanuvato, 339  
 Novomikhailovka, 339  
 Novopoltavka, 339  
 Novorossiisk, 59  
 Novosibirsk, 335

## O

Ob R., 304  
 Obitochka R., 339  
 Obitochno, 339  
 Oder R., 13

Odessa, 59, 63, 64, 68, 69, 78, 174,  
207, 209, 231, 239, 269, 315  
Ohrloff, 20, 21, 28, 30, 31, 32, 51,  
60, 61, 69, 70, 77, 78, 165, 172,  
192, 199, 215, 232, 253, 273, 316,  
318  
Ohrloff-Halbstadt-Neukircher  
*Gemeinde*, 199  
Ohrloff-Petershagen *Gemeinde*, 30,  
68, 71, 78  
Ohrloff Power Block, 60  
Oklahoma, 90, 91, 92, 98, 102, 264  
Olexandrovka, 339  
Ontario, 88, 190  
Orechow(v), 164, 165, 179, 209  
Orenburg, 80, 95, 220

## P

Panfilovka (Mariental), 339  
Pankratz, Andreas, 44, 47  
Pankratz, Jakob, 44, 47, 84, 85  
Papacy, 3  
Papke, Gerhard, 190, 259  
Paraguay, 285, 286, 287, 289  
Paris, Treaty of, 83  
Parker, S.D., 85, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94,  
104  
Pastwa, 28, 31, 61, 319  
Paul I, Czar, 17  
Pauls, Frieda, 330, 334  
Pauls (Bartsch), Tina, 330, 331, 334,  
335  
Paulsheim, xxiii, 29, 31, 41, 61, 76, 319  
Paulus, General, 329  
Penner, Mr., 147  
Penner, Franz, 62  
Penner, Gerhard, 54  
Penner, Gerhard, 289  
Penner, Widow Gerhard, 282  
Penner, Heinrich, 278  
Penner, Heinrich, 289  
Penner, Johann, 84  
Penner, Johann, 151  
Penner, Johann, 220  
Penner (nee Engbrecht), Margaretha,  
84  
Penner, Maria, 278  
Perekop, 164, 165  
Persia, 151  
Peters, Abraham, 194  
Peters, Bernhard, 149, 156  
Peters, Mrs. Bernhard, 330  
Peters, Elisabeth, 195  
Peters, Franz, 194  
Peters, Franz G., 194  
Peters, Gerhard, 195  
Peters, Isaak, 195  
Peters, Isaak, 195  
Peters, Isaak F., 117, 188, 189,  
194-198, 202, 205, 207, 219

Peters, Johannes, 194  
Peters, Katharina, 195  
Peters, Katharina, 195, 196  
Peters, Kornelius, 110  
Peters, Kornelius, 119, 307  
Peters, Maria, 195  
Peters, Nikolai, 195  
Peters, Petrus, 195  
Peters, Selma, 195  
Petershagen, 21, 28, 30, 31, 61, 316,  
318  
Petrograd, see St. Petersburg  
Petropalowka, 112  
Philadelphia, 98, 101  
Phillips, Dirk, 7, 10  
Phillips, Obbe, 7  
Pincher Creek, Alberta, 207, 291  
Plett, Abraham, 120  
Plett, Abraham, 309  
Plett, Aganetha, 120, 157  
Plett, Anna, 120, 305  
Plett (Neufeld), Anna, 314  
Plett, Bernard, 117, 119, 205, 207,  
248, 289, 290, 309  
Plett, Bernhard, 120  
Plett, David, 54  
Plett, Elisabeth, 122  
Plett (nee Voth), Elisabeth, 156  
Plett, Elisabeth I, 157  
Plett, Elisabeth II, 157  
Plett, Elisabeth, 306  
Plett (nee Kroeker), Elisabeth, 330  
Plett, Enelse, 120, 157, 330, 335  
Plett, Franz I, 157  
Plett, Franz II, 157  
Plett, Gerhard, xxi, 117, 118, 119,  
123, 128, 147, 149, 150, 155,  
156-162, 188, 207, 217, 222, 229,  
230, 233, 245, 257, 258, 275, 276,  
279, 284, 305, 307, 330, 335  
Plett, Gerhard I, 157  
Plett, Gerhard II, 157, 160, 292, 293,  
305, 307, 330, 335  
Plett, Gerhard, 330, 331, 332  
Plett, Gerhard K., 306, 307, 309, 314  
Plett, Gertrude, 120, 157  
Plett, Gertrude, 120  
Plett, Heinrich, 95  
Plett, Heinrich, 120, 157, 193  
Plett, Heinrich, 330, 335  
Plett, Isaak, 122  
Plett, Jakob, 54  
Plett, Jakob, 95, 178  
Plett, Jakob, 157  
Plett, Jakob, 331, 332  
Plett, Mrs. Jakob, 330  
Plett, Johann, 90  
Plett, Johann, 330, 332  
Plett, Julius, 44, 47, 95, 118, 122,  
156, 157, 210

Plett, Julius Jr., 117, 119  
 Plett, Katharina, 120, 157, 330, 335  
 Plett, Katharina, 330, 335  
 Plett, Kornelius, 54  
 Plett, Kornelius, 117, 119, 306  
 Plett, Kornelius, 120  
 Plett, Kornelius, 157, 159, 230  
 Plett, Kornelius J., 210  
 Plett, Maria, 120  
 Plett, Maria, 120, 157, 330, 335  
 Plett, Maria, 122  
 Plett, Maria, 289  
 Plett, Maria, 305  
 Plett, Maria, 330, 335  
 Plett, Peter, 157  
 Plett, Peter, 248, 249  
 Plevna, 211  
 Podolia, 327, 331  
 Poettger, Heinrich, 117  
 Poland, 1, 12, 13, 225, 226, 237, 311,  
 313, 315, 327, 331, 333, 334  
 Policeman, 118, 119  
 Pologi, 171  
 Pomerania, 13  
 Popovo, Station, 250  
 Pordenau, 28, 30, 31, 44, 61, 68,  
 156, 319  
 Port Arthur, 211  
 Portsmouth, Treaty of, 212  
 Potempkin, Prince Gregor, 14, 15, 16  
 Poznan, 333  
 Prague, 13  
 Prangenau, 29, 31, 44, 51, 61, 233,  
 318  
 Premarno (Hierschau), 39, 234, 242  
 Prenzlau, 287, 289  
 Prezemyśl, 224  
 Pripet Marshes, 231  
 Prischib, 25, 302  
 Prostor (Grossweide), 339  
 Protestant(s), 5, 9  
 Provisional Government, 225, 226,  
 235, 236  
 Prussia, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 25, 26,  
 27, 30, 32, 218  
 Purge, xxi, 309, 310

## Q

Quebec (City), 196, 202, 291, 298  
 Quebec (Province), 291  
 Quiring (Regier), Katharina, 101,  
 103

## R

Rachmanovka, 327, 331, 333  
 Radical Reformation, 8  
 Rahn, Johann, 155, 304  
 Rattenberg, 6, 13  
 Reaumur, 20

Red Army, xxi, 127, 173, 223, 236,  
 242, 243, 244, 248, 250, 251, 252,  
 253, 254, 255, 257, 260, 261, 262,  
 284, 285, 320, 331  
 Red Gate, 290  
 Reformation, 3, 4, 8  
 Regehr (Goerz), Helena, 199, 200, 201,  
 203  
 Regehr, Jakob, 201  
 Regehr, Johann, 201  
 Regehr, P., 233  
 Regehr, Peter, 201  
 Regensburg, 13  
 Regier, Abraham, 99  
 Regier, Anna, 97  
 Regier (Fast), Elisabeth, 86  
 Regier, Elisabeth, 97  
 Regier, Gerhard, 90, 206  
 Regier, Heinrich, 86, 101  
 Regier, Heinrich, 101  
 Regier, Isaak, 90, 206  
 Regier, Jakob, 101  
 Regier, Johann, 44, 47, 53, 86, 97,  
 101  
 Regier, Johann, 101, 102, 103  
 Regier, Johann J., 77, 86, 92, 94,  
 97-100, 101  
 Regier, Johann S., 97, 99  
 Regier (Schmidt), Katharina, 97  
 Regier, Katharina, 103  
 Regier, Klaas, 86, 178  
 Regier, Kornelius, xxi, 58, 79, 90, 97,  
 98, 101, 102, 205, 206  
 Regier, Kornelius, 101, 103  
 Regier, Peter, 86, 92, 94, 97, 98, 99,  
 101-103  
 Regier, Peter Jr., 101  
 Regier, Sara, 97  
 Regier (Unruh), Susanna, 97, 98  
 Reimer, Abram, 44, 47  
 Reimer, Jakob, 282  
 Reimer, Klaas, 30  
 Reimer, Peter, 90  
 Reimer, Peter, 178  
 Rempel, Abraham D., 142  
 Rempel, Aron, 220  
 Rempel, Jakob, 179  
 Rempel, N., 281  
 Rethondes, 227, 240  
 Reublin, Wilhelm, 6, 10  
 Reval, 231, 239  
 Revolution, 225, 226, 234, 235, 236,  
 259, 266  
 Rhine R., 13  
 Riediger (Peters), Elisabeth, 194, 196,  
 197, 198  
 Riga, 226, 231, 236, 239, 290, 298,  
 315, 333  
 Rogalsky, Isaac, 117  
 Rolschegda, 335

- Roman Catholic Church, 3, 5, 9, 10  
 Rome, 3  
 Rosenberg, Alfred, 317  
 Rosenort, 28, 31, 61, 194, 316, 318  
 Rosent(h)al, 16, 194  
 Rosthern, Sask., 189, 202, 265, 285, 291, 298  
 Rostov, 209, 269, 315  
 Rudnerweide, 28, 29, 31, 61, 62, 318  
 Rueckenau, 26, 28, 31, 51, 61, 146, 150, 164, 165, 189, 215, 252, 253, 281, 316, 318  
 Rumania, 174, 231, 239, 313, 314, 315, 317, 333  
 Rundsted, General von, 313  
 Russian Orthodox Church, 25, 233  
 Russia, many references throughout  
 Russian(s), 77, 144, 164, 172, 190, 287, 292, 295, 296, 302, 306, 316, 317, 320, 332  
 Russification, 87, 185  
 Russo-Japanese War, 180, 211, 212
- S
- Sagradowka, 80, 95, 153, 243, 327, 331  
 St. John, N.B., 291  
 St. Petersburg (Petrograd, Leningrad), 15, 17, 71, 86, 170, 212, 214, 225, 226, 231, 234, 235, 236, 239, 269, 309, 313, 315  
 Salzburg, 13  
 Samara, 226  
 Sanitaeter, 211, 212, 230, 232  
 Sarajevo, Bosnia, 224, 229, 231, 239  
 Saskatchewan, 85, 104, 105, 192, 199, 202, 265, 285, 291, 298  
 Sattler, Michael, 5, 6, 10  
 Sawatzky, Heinrich, 161, 305  
 Saxon, 182 Regiment, 240  
 Saxony, 13  
 Saxony, Lower, xxii, 311, 327, 334  
 Scarlet fever, 320, 322  
 Schamk, Crimea, 156  
 Schardau, 28, 31, 61, 258, 268, 319  
 Schartner, Johann, 157  
 Schellenberg, Elder Abraham, 97, 98, 103  
 Schellenberg, Gerhard, 305  
 Schellenberg (Regier), Maria, 97  
 Schlabbach, Christian, 39  
 Schlapakoff and Co., 168  
 Schleithelm, 5, 13  
 Schleithelm Confession, 5  
 Schleswig-Holstein, 11, 13  
 Schmidt, Peter, 39, 78  
 Schoenau, 28, 31, 61, 318  
 Schoenfeld, 188, 194  
 Schoenfeld (*Wolost*), 194  
 Schoenhorst, 16  
 Schoensee, 28, 31, 41, 61, 149, 317  
 Schoenwiese, 16  
 School(s), 34, 46, 183-193  
 Schroeder, Mr., 143  
 Schroeder (Braun), Margaret, 265, 266  
 Schroeter, Peter, 86, 178  
 Schulze, 57, 58  
 Schulzenbott, 57, 58, 114, 205  
 Scotland, Empress of, 298  
 Scythian, 19, 24  
 Seattle, 345  
 Sebezh, 286  
 Secession Document, 70  
 Selbstschutz, xxi, 223, 238, 240, 241, 242, 243, 247, 248, 249, 260, 261  
 Senta, Yugoslavia, 263  
 Serbia, 224, 225, 229, 231, 239  
 Sevastopol, 83, 209, 262, 269, 315  
 Seventh Day Adventist Church, 150  
 Shirokii Yar, 339  
 Sholtanowskij, General Major, 213  
 Siberia, 68, 84, 96, 151, 155, 159, 210, 211, 226, 230, 287, 304, 311, 314, 316, 334, 335  
 Siebert, Mr., 97, 98  
 Siemens, Mrs., 330  
 Siemens, Abram, 114, 116, 117, 119  
 Siemens, Aganetha, 111  
 Siemens, Alfred, 116  
 Siemens, Anna, 111  
 Siemens, Franz, 293, 295  
 Siemens, Widow Heinrich, 117  
 Siemens, Johann, 44, 47, 58  
 Siemens, Johann, 117, 119, 205, 206, 272  
 Siemens, Kornelius, 119, 205, 207, 233, 307  
 Siemens, Peter, 111  
 Silesia, S.S., 85, 104  
 Simferopol, 63, 84, 147, 169, 193, 208, 209, 211, 262  
 Simons, Menno, 7-8, 10, 11, 71, 311  
 Slagel, Arthur, 164, 169, 273  
 Slashchev, General, 250  
 Slovakia, 313, 315  
 Sola Scriptura, 4  
 Soltau, 327, 333, 334  
 South Dakota, 85, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94  
 South-End (Portage Ave.) Mennonite Brethren Church, 196  
 Southampton, 291  
 Soviet, xxi, 170, 214, 225, 226, 235, 236, 237, 238, 242, 260, 337  
 Soviet Government, 155, 268, 273, 287, 319, 320  
 Soviet Union (USSR), xxi, xxii, 173, 269, 273, 283, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 301, 304, 311, 313, 314, 315, 333  
 Spain, 3, 11

- Sparrau, 29, 31, 41, 61, 150, 156,  
     267, 319  
 Spat, 84, 156, 199, 218  
 Spenst, Peter J., 289, 292, 298  
 Sperling Family, 330  
 Sperling (Plett, Harder), Aganetha,  
     54  
 Sperling (Warkentin), Anna, 54, 55  
 Sperling (Neufeld, Abrahams),  
     Elisabeth, 54  
 Sperling (Dueck, Warkentin),  
     Gertrude, 54  
 Sperling, Heinrich, 54, 55, 96  
 Sperling, Johann, 54  
 Sperling, Kornelius, 141  
 Sperling (Plett), Margaretha, 54  
 Sperling (Plett), Maria, 54  
 Sperling, Peter, 54, 55, 117, 119  
 Sperling, Peter, 210  
 Sperling (Thiessen), Sara, 54  
 Sperling (Penner), Susanna, 54  
 Sperling, Tobias, 23, 44, 47, 51,  
     54-55  
 Staess, Jakob, 167  
 Stalin, Joseph, 302, 303, 309  
 Stalingrad, 311, 315, 327, 329  
 Stefano, Treaty of, 211  
 Steinbach, 31, 61, 318  
 Steinbach, Man., 196, 198  
 Steinfeld, 29, 31, 61, 76, 318  
 Stepove, 337  
 Stobbe, Aganetha, 111  
 Stobbe, Heinrich, 147  
 Stobbe, Heinrich, 288, 289  
 Stobbe, Jakob, 45, 47  
 Stobbe, Jakob, 117, 119  
 Stobbe, Jakob, 117, 119, 147, 289  
 Stobbe, Johann, 119, 273, 287,  
     307  
 Stobbe, Katharina, 111  
 Stobbe, Kornelius, 117, 119  
 Stobbe, Kornelius, 289  
 Stobbe, Mrs. Kornelius, 113  
 Stobbe, Maria, 111, 289  
 Stobbe, Peter, 289  
 Strasbourg, 5, 6, 13  
 Stulnewo (Stulneve(o)), xxii, 146,  
     171, 172, 173, 232, 233, 242, 253,  
     290, 297, 306, 316, 324, 337, 339  
 Stumpf, Simon, 4  
 Sudermann Brothers, 168  
 Sudermann, Johann, 282  
 Sudermann, Leonhard, 88  
 Sudermann, Leonard, 281, 282  
 Sudermann, Peter, 313, 314  
 Sukkau Family, 146  
 Sukkau, Anna, 330, 334  
 Sukkau, Heinrich, 117, 118, 119,  
     147, 150, 151  
 Sukkau, Johann, 117  
 Sukkau, Johann J., 289  
 Summerfallow, 34  
 Swabia, 6, 13  
 Swamp fever (malaria), 11  
 Sweden, 142, 231  
 Switzerland, 5, 6, 10, 13, 264  
 Switzerland, S.S., 98
- T
- Tabor College, 104  
 Taganrog, 63, 209  
 Tajga, 304  
 Tannenber, Battle of, 224  
 Taurida, 18, 207, 208, 209, 210, 213,  
     214, 233  
 Tavonius, Dr., 113, 114  
 Tchernayg, 83  
 Tschernigowka, see Chernigowka  
 Teachers, 185, 192  
 Teichroeb, Family Franz, 324  
 Tenets of Faith, 8, 9, 10  
 Terek, 80, 96, 151, 180, 281, 282  
 Teutonia, S.S., 91  
 Texas, 98  
 Thiessen, Mrs., 330, 334  
 Thiessen, Abraham, 178  
 Thiessen, Aganetha, 178  
 Thiessen, Bernhard, 180  
 Thiessen, Emma, 330  
 Thiessen, Franz, 45, 47  
 Thiessen, Gerhard, 248  
 Thiessen, Heinrich, 95  
 Thiessen, Heinrich, 111  
 Thiessen, Heinrich, 289  
 Thiessen, Heinrich J., 38, 43, 54, 55,  
     79, 84, 94, 96, 109, 113, 116,  
     118, 149, 151, 163, 178-181, 187,  
     188, 206  
 Thiessen, Jakob, 45, 47, 58, 84, 178  
 Thiessen, Jakob, 54  
 Thiessen, Jakob, 117, 118, 119, 146  
 Thiessen, Jakob, 307  
 Thiessen, Jakob, 332  
 Thiessen (nee Zehrt), Mrs. Jakob, 330  
 Thiessen, Jakob M., 178, 180  
 Thiessen Johann, 119, 248, 281, 282  
 Thiessen, Johann, 178  
 Thiessen, Johann, 289  
 Thiessen, Mrs. Johann, 124  
 Thiessen, J.G., 203  
 Thiessen, Maria H., 272  
 Tiege, 28, 31, 51, 60, 61, 62, 150,  
     167, 240, 282, 284, 316, 318, 325  
 Tiegenhagen, 28, 31, 61, 150, 240,  
     318  
 Tiegerweide, 21, 28, 31, 61, 68, 244,  
     250, 316, 318  
 Tkachev, General, 252  
 Todleben, General Eduard, 88

Toews, Abraham, 60  
 Toews, Agatha, 173  
 Toews, David, 285  
 Toews, Family Gerhard, 324  
 Toews, Heinrich, 68, 149  
 Toews, Heinrich, 258  
 Toews, Isaak, 90  
 Toews, Johann, 297  
 Toews, Kornelius, 62  
 Toews, Kornelius, 305  
 Toews, Peter, 117  
 Toews, Peter, 173  
 Tokmak R., 18, 19, 24, 171, 337, 339  
 Tokmakbahn (Tokmak Railroad), 170, 171, 173, 244  
 Tokmatschansk, 171  
 Tomsk, 304  
 Trachoma, 286, 288, 291, 298, 320, 322  
 Trades and Professions, 66  
 Tappe, George von, 14, 15  
 Trotsky, L.D., 226, 236  
 Tschongraw, Crimea, 317, 323, 324, 325  
 Tsushima Straits, Battle of, 212  
 Tuberculosis, 72, 320, 322, 335  
 Turkey, 14, 15, 16, 24, 83, 210, 211, 224, 227, 234, 239, 262  
 Typhus, 72, 244, 259, 320, 322, 335  
 Tyrol, 5, 6, 10, 13

## U

Ufa, 269  
 Uklein, Semen, 24  
 Ukraine, 153, 223, 226, 227, 237, 242, 260, 270, 271, 273, 274, 284, 285, 286, 299, 311, 313, 314, 317, 331, 337  
 Ukrainian Central Council, 226, 237  
 Ukrainian(s), 144, 213, 267, 292, 302, 306, 320, 323  
 USSR, see Soviet Union  
 USA (America), 1, 44, 45, 46, 52, 80, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 98, 101, 104, 143, 149, 153, 160, 180, 206, 223, 264, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 279, 284, 286, 288, 292  
 Unrau, Heinrich, 220  
 Unruh, Anna, 85  
 Unruh, B.H., 285  
 Unruh, Benjamin, 54  
 Unruh, Dietrich, 190  
 Unruh, Gerhard, 155, 202  
 Unruh, *Aeltester* H., 230  
 Unruh, H., 235  
 Unruh (Loewen), Helena, 104  
 Unruh, Johann, 85  
 Unruh, Katharina, 84  
 Unruh, Kornelius, 85

Unruh, Peter, 98  
 Unruh, Peter, 178  
 Unruh, Tobias, 45, 47, 84, 85  
 Unruh, Tobias Jr., 85  
 Unterhaltungsblatt, 52, 64, 144, 174  
 Ural Mountains, 314

## V

Vaderland, S.S., 101  
 Vancouver, 203  
 Vancouver Island, 202  
 Verband der Buerger Hollandscher Herkunft (VBHH), 285, 286  
 Verband der Mennoniten Sued-Russlands (VMSR), 284, 285  
 Versailles, Treaty of, 223, 227  
 Vienna, 13, 231, 239  
 Vinnicia, see Winnitza  
 Vistula Delta, 11, 12, 13, 27  
 Vistula R., 11, 13  
 Vladovka 1 (Waldheim), 337, 339  
 Vladovka 2 (Hierschau), xxii, 337, 344, 339  
 Vogt, Officer, 241, 261  
 Volga R., 267, 269, 314, 315  
 Voth, Elisabeth, 122  
 Voth, Jakob, 90  
 Voth, Jakob, 162, 305

## W

Wagons, 166, 167  
 Waldheim, many references throughout  
 Waldheim, Saskatchewan, 85, 104, 291  
 Waldshut, 6, 13  
 Wall, Aron G., 128, 159, 245, 249, 257, 258, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296  
 Wall, Bernard, 95  
 Wall, Gerhard, 170  
 Wall, Isaak, 45, 47, 53  
 Wall, Jakob, 45, 47, 53, 174  
 Wall, Jakob, M., 90  
 Wall, Johann, 170  
 Wall, Johann, 291, 294, 295, 296, 298  
 Wall, Katharina, 291, 294  
 Wall, Kornelius, 272, 282  
 Wall, Kornelius M., 90, 180  
 Wall, Peter, 45  
 Wall, Peter, 147  
 Wall, Peter Isaak, 95, 96  
 Wallmann, Mr., 119  
 Wallmann, Lydia, 111  
 Warkentin, Mrs., 330  
 Warkentin, Mrs., 330, 334  
 Warkentin, Anna, 149  
 Warkentin, Dirk, 68

- Warkentin, Family Franz Sr., 324  
 Warkentin, Family Franz Jr., 324  
 Warkentin, Gerhard, 54  
 Warkentin, Gerhard, 117, 119, 272  
 Warkentin, Heinrich, 220  
 Warkentin, Heinrich, 332  
 Warkentin, Jakob, 30, 68  
 Warkentin, Jakob, 240  
 Warkentin, Johann, 179  
 Warkentin, Justina, 179  
 Warkentin, Kornelius, 233  
 Warkentin, Nina, 330  
 Warkentin, Peter, 119, 145, 149, 151, 294, 295, 297  
 Warkentin, Peter, 330, 334  
 Warsaw, 231, 239, 315, 332, 333  
 Warthegau, 327, 332  
 Washington, 317  
 Wassiljewka, 171  
 Waterlanders, 10  
 Weber, Johann, 90  
 Wedel, Helena, 272  
 Wedel, Johann, 65  
 Wedel, Kornelius, 26, 39  
 Wedel, Peter, 29  
 Wedel, Peter, 119  
 Weisseerdegrube (White Earth Pit), 67, 68, 147, 156, 188, 205, 308, 320, 323, 341  
 Wernersdorf, 29, 31, 41, 61, 317  
 Weser R., 13  
 White Army, xxi, 126, 127, 173, 223, 242, 243, 244, 247, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 257, 261, 262, 263, 288  
 White Earth Pit, see Weisseerdegrube  
 Wiebe, Dr., 296  
 Wiebe, Elisabeth, 111  
 Wiebe, Gerhard, 111  
 Wiebe, Gerhard, 117, 119, 143, 306, 307, 314  
 Wiebe Gerhard Jr., 309  
 Wiebe, Heinrich, 193  
 Wiebe, Heinrich G., 279  
 Wiebe, Jakob, 45, 47  
 Wiebe, Jakob, 314  
 Wiebe, Johann, 45  
 Wiebe, Kornelius, 314  
 Wiebe (nee Fast), Margaretha, 323, 330  
 Wiebe, Philip, 60, 178, 183  
 Wiebe, Susanna, 111  
 Wiens, Franz G., 202  
 Wiens, Heinrich, 68, 149  
 Wiens, H.E., 100  
 Wiens, Johann, 90  
 Wiens, Klaas, 25  
 Wiesenfeld, 281, 282  
 Wilhelm II, Kaiser, 227, 240  
 Willms (Toews), Aganetha (Nettie), 120, 124, 249, 259, 291, 292, 293, 295  
 Willms (nee Wiebe), Elisabeth, 306  
 Willms, Franz, 111  
 Willms, Franz J., 192, 199, 289, 291  
 Willms, Frieda, 331  
 Willms, Gerhard, 17  
 Willms, Gerhard, 120, 123, 193, 265, 291, 293, 294, 297, 320, 331, 335  
 Willms (nee Plett, then Braun), Gerturde, 110, 122-129, 249, 254, 257, 258, 259, 260, 264, 265, 291, 320  
 Willms (Baerg), Gertrude, 111, 120, 123, 193, 249, 259, 291  
 Willms, Gertrude, 123, 259  
 Willms, Jakob, 119, 130, 151, 205, 207, 217, 237, 238, 242, 288, 289, 291  
 Willms, Jakob, 147  
 Willms, Jakob Jr., 207, 268, 287  
 Willms, Johann, also the family and the *Wirtschaft*, 117, 119, 124, 125, 126, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 147, 170, 234, 249, 254, 255, 257, 259, 260, 268, 281, 290, 291, 292, 295, 296  
 Willms, Johann, Jr., 111, 120, 124, 144, 193, 259, 291, 292, 293, 295, 296, 298  
 Willms, Katharina, 123  
 Willms (Plett), Katharina, 156, 157, 330, 335  
 Willms (Huebert), Katharina, 120, 124, 249, 259, 291, 292, 293, 295  
 Willms, Katharina, 331  
 Willms, Kornelius, 331, 332  
 Willms, Maria, 111  
 Windmill, 67, 323, 341, 343  
 Winkler, Man., 291  
 Winnipeg, 192, 196, 266, 345  
 Winnitza (Vinnicia), 327, 331, 333  
 Winter Palace, 214, 215, 226, 236  
 Wirtschaft, 129-148, 267, 282  
 Witmarsum, 7, 13  
 Witte, Primie Minister, 212  
 Wittenberg, 3, 13  
 Wolf, Peter, 119, 307  
 Wolfsburg, 328, 333, 335  
 W(v)olhynia, 39, 231  
 World War I, 159, 169, 184, 186, 190, 208, 210, 221, 223, 224-227, 229, 261, 283, 309, 313  
 World War II, 313  
 Worms, 13  
 Wrangel, General P.N., 244, 250, 252, 255, 262  
 Wuerttemberg, 25

Wuest, Eduard, 70  
Wuestenfelde, 8, 13

## Y

Yalta, 216  
Yarrow, B.C., 197  
Yerkhni Tokmak, 339  
York and Hamilton Counties, 91, 206  
Yugoslavia, 263, 264, 265, 292

## Z

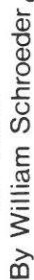
Zagorsky, Nicholas, 309

Zaporozhye (Alexandrovsk), 209,  
231, 251, 269, 324, 337, 339, 345  
Zarekonstantinowka, 170, 172  
Zehrt family, 118  
Zehrt, Alice, 111  
Zehrt, Susanna, 111  
Zelenoi, Count, 87  
Zhloba, General, 244, 250, 252, 253  
Zurich, 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 13  
Zwickau, 13  
Zwingli, Ulrich, 3, 4, 5



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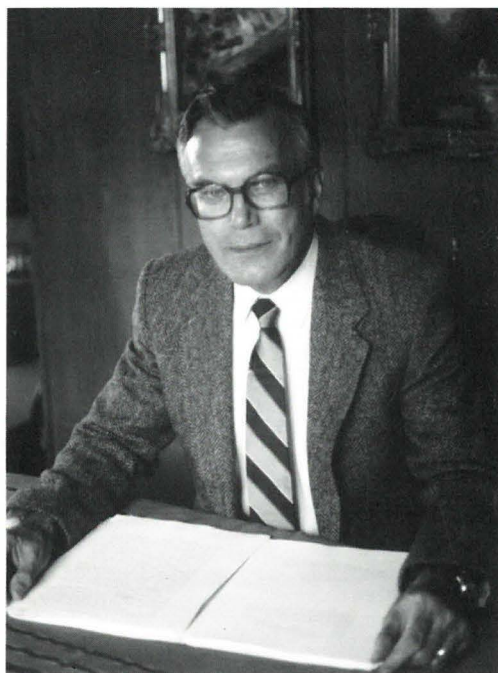
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The author, Helmut T. Huebert, is a practising orthopaedic surgeon in Winnipeg, Canada. The son of a Mennonite Brethren minister, he spent his early years moving from place to place, following the study and teaching career of his father. In 1948 the family settled in Winnipeg, where Huebert obtained his high school, university and most of his post-graduate education. While actively participating in his chosen profession, he has a deep commitment to his church, where he is active in the local congregation, as well as in provincial and national church boards. One of Huebert's longstanding interests has been history, particularly his own heritage, Mennonite history. *"HIERSCHAU: An Example of Russian Mennonite Life"* is an expression of this interest, originally stimulated by his high school Mennonite History teacher, Dr. Gerhard Lohrenz.

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